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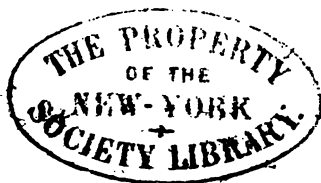
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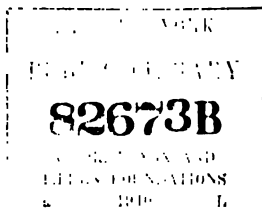
LINKS IN A CHAIN
BY MARGARET SUTTON
BRISCOE ⊕ ⊕ ⊕ ⊕ ⊕

AUTHOR OF "PERCHANCE TO
DREAM" AND OTHER STORIES



K.

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IN
GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT.

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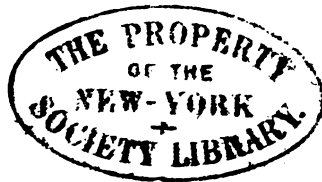
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*The man
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LINK I.*

A SIDE LIGHT.

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." — PROV. xxv. 11.

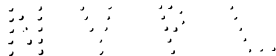
"DISREPUTABLE weather! — simply disreputable!" murmured Mr. Atwood.

He looked out from under the shelter of his umbrella comfortably as he spoke.

The rain was falling from the heavens in whirling sheets of silver. From a roof just ahead of him the spouting had given up carrying off the flow as hopeless. The water ran over it in streams, which the wind caught again and flung aside in the air, breaking them into raindrops once more.

Mr. Atwood paused and watched the

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tangle for a moment ; then shrugging the collar of his heavy overcoat still higher, and dexterously grasping his umbrella handle close by the ribs, he struggled on.

Around the street corner, and approaching the point of the angle which Mr. Atwood was nearing, another figure was battling against the weather ; but where the man showed a certain vigour and enjoyment in resistance, the woman — for it was a woman, and a young one — walked with a nervous rapidity, and an apparent heedlessness of the wind's efforts to turn her light umbrella inside out.

At the street corner the big steadily advancing umbrella and the little wavering one met with a crash which brought the respective owners to an abrupt stand. They disengaged their weapons, and peered out at each other through the mist.

"Celeste ! Why, my dear child !" exclaimed Mr. Atwood.

He raised his hand quickly to his hat, but only to hold it in place, not in salute.

Civilities die a natural death in a whirlwind.



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The gust of air seized the girl's bobbing umbrella, and settled the question of turning it wrong side out once and forever. In the same moment Mr. Atwood's covering swept over her like a great sheltering wing.

"Come here, child," he said; "there is room for one more in the ark. Throw that wreck of silk and whalebone in the gutter, and come under gingham for once in your life."

Celeste obeyed, taking his offered arm. Conversation was impossible until the corner was passed where the four winds of heaven seemed to have appointed a rendezvous. Then Mr. Atwood looked down at his companion's costume and smiled.

"Thin shoes, new gloves, and a silk sieve waterproof! May I ask, madame, where you are going?"

"I am taking a walk," said the girl, speaking for the first time.

Mr. Atwood laughed. "*Were*, Celeste," he corrected, "were. You are being taken home now, my dear; there, I trust, to be well scolded, as these many moons have lapsed since the honeymoon."

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He looked down suddenly at the hand on his arm, then into the face by his side, where there were drops of water which he did not think were rain, and the lips were as tremulous as the hand.

"Old! Heavens, how old you make me feel!" said Mr. Atwood, anxiously examining the ribs of his umbrella. "Here you are, a sedate matron, and I remember the first day I visited your family, and caught you, a little tot, with long shaving curls pinned to your yellow pigtails to eke them out. You don't remember it, but I do. You were a pretty child, Celeste. You might have been a good one, too, if we had spoiled you less."

A great drop, which again was not rain, fell on Mr. Atwood's sleeve. Without turning he talked on. "What business have you to be out a day like this? The wind is enough to make you hoarse for a week, let alone the dampness. Here, take my handkerchief and tie it about your throat."

Celeste took the handkerchief he offered, with a little hysterical laugh.

"That is just like you," she said, openly

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drying her eyes. "Ignore, ignore, always ignore — appearances, always appearances!"

"I don't think you can quite quarrel with me on that score. Here I am walking up a thoroughfare with a weeping young woman clinging to my arm, and all the 'Quaker ladies' in the puddles staring at us. Could Mrs. Grundy ask for more?"

"Don't laugh," cried Celeste hysterically, "pray don't!"

Mr. Atwood turned and stood quite still for a moment, looking into her face.

Then he lifted the umbrella slightly, and looked out from under it. They had been walking in the teeth of the storm, but now he altered their course to a cross street, where the inner edge of the farther pavement was comparatively sheltered.

"Now," he said, "we have miles of way before us. My handkerchief is a large one, and my reputation can stand it. You may tell me what it is if you wish, and if I can help you; if not, you may cry your cry out with the weather, and then I will take you home."

They walked on in silence. At last Celeste spoke.

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"I think," she said thoughtfully, "I think that I shall tell you. I am so sorely in need of help, and the wind has blown you to me. My trouble is about my husband."

Mr. Atwood laid his hand quickly on the one in his arm. He shook his head, half smiling.

"No," he said, "the wind never meant that. It blew you to me because it knew I could be heartless enough to send you away without letting you speak. No, whatever it be, whether great or small, if it concerns your married life, tell no one. Fight it down. Put it behind you. Do anything but talk."

"Then you too fail me," said Celeste bitterly.

Mr. Atwood's voice grew graver, his manner more serious.

"You must not misunderstand me. You know me as always devoted to your interests. I have no wish to learn your secret. My advice to you is to keep it. At the same time if you need help, if you need me, I am here."

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"I must have help," she answered, in a choked voice ; "I have just discovered that my husband is a liar."

Mr. Atwood uttered an exclamation of incredulity. "A liar ! Impossible, Celeste !"

"You thought it a lovers' quarrel, did you not ? Now, will you listen ? As, you are a lawyer and a man of the world, you may understand."

"I am your old friend, and your husband's," he answered gravely. "Some one has misled you maliciously."

"What I know I discovered myself."

"Then you are mistaken."

"No, I tell you I know it. He has been deceiving me for months. Do you suppose I accepted light evidence ?"

Mr. Atwood was silent for a moment ; then he spoke simply.

"You mean," he said, "that he has been unfaithful to you ?"

Celeste lifted her head proudly, her color rising.

"No, that humiliation I am spared. My husband is still my husband."

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The expression of troubled gravity on Mr. Atwood's face lightened.

"Then," he replied, with decision, "his wife must be his wife."

"I have made up my mind. I shall return to my mother," said Celeste quickly.

Apparently Mr. Atwood did not hear her.

"What is it that has happened?" he asked.

Celeste flushed painfully. Her eyes dropped.

"How can I bring myself to tell it?" she cried bitterly. "I am so ashamed! If it were not so contemptible!—its hideousness lies in its smallness."

There was almost a smile in Mr. Atwood's eyes as he looked down at her.

"Child," he said, half sadly, half whimsically, "men are not great."

She glanced up quickly.

"Ah, you have not heard yet. I have not told you. You know how my fortune is left to me?"

"Yes; by your father's will it was left you outright, was it not?"

"*Leaving* me outright you had better

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say," corrected the girl, with a laugh which was not good to hear. "I wish I had never seen a penny of it."

It was not a pretty story which she had to tell and he to hear.

"I have been reinvesting," said Celeste. "My father's investments were too old-fashioned. You have no idea how easy it was; I had only to sign papers, and my husband did all the rest. I was to be troubled with nothing."

The umbrella brushed a long icicle from a gateway which they passed to the pavement at their feet. Its icy tinkle seemed to find its echo in her voice.

"Yesterday—it is the old story—my husband gave me a box of papers to assort, and among them I stumbled on a letter which I read twice before I understood. It was an acknowledgment of almost the exact amount I had last reinvested, dated the same day—one of my husband's debts of honour. His honour! I understood then why I was not to be troubled."

Whatever were Mr. Atwood's thoughts, they were not expressed in his face. His

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eyes were fastened on the lower points of his umbrella, from which the water dropped ceaselessly. His countenance was inscrutable.

"Had you no further evidence?" he asked quietly.

"In plenty. It rolled up like a snow-ball. I have an unfortunate memory for dates and sums. Each one of my reinvestments antedated some settlements. Do you suppose I was easier to convince than you? Comparatively speaking, they all agreed."

"With what?"

"The other papers."

"The other papers? Ah, Eve — Eve. It has been so since the first little red apples were made. Child, I could almost wish you had remained ignorant: the tree of knowledge bears such bitter fruit. Yet, sooner or later it must have come."

"I have been thinking that it would be best for me to go first to my mother's house, and from there make my plans," said Celeste, with the same high-strung composure.

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"Once," answered Mr. Atwood thoughtfully, "I knew a woman—a devoted wife—whose husband was the most scientific brute with whom I ever came in contact. After years of torture I induced her to sue for divorce for her children's protection. His party—he inevitably has one, you know—maintained that the root of all the trouble lay in the fact that she did not care for him, and they found listeners."

"I shall go to my mother," repeated Celeste firmly.

"And your children?"

"I shall take them with me."

"And if your husband claim them?"

"I should contest it."

"In court?"

"In court, if necessary."

"And are you sure that in after-years they will thank you—even if by so doing you rescue their property?"

"That would not be my motive," she interrupted.

Mr. Atwood went on, unheeding. "They might, perhaps, prefer their mother's and father's unspotted name to riches. Chil-

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dren have an odd habit of resenting these things in after-life. I have heard parents complained of as handicaps often enough to wish that children could select them for themselves."

Celeste's lip curled.

"How civilized we are!" she said scornfully. "You make your little bon-mots; I smile; we walk on with my life's problem under discussion, and it strikes neither of us as odd."

"Yes, we are very civilized; but would you have us otherwise? Would it be better if I told you with brutal directness that the world draws small distinction between a woman who returns of choice to her family and a woman *returned*? Suppose I pointed out to you baldly that there are always two sides told to a story; that tongues in plenty would say that you should have given the money; and, finally, that your children might live to curse the day when their mother published their father's shame — would that be better?"

He could feel that she winced.

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"Exposure would not be necessary. He could trust to my silence. I am in a position to dictate terms, I think. Let him take the bulk of the property. All I ask of him is that I may be allowed to go quietly, and take my children with me."

"And what has he answered?"

"Nothing as yet. When I met you I had come out from it all to breathe and think how best to speak to him."

Mr. Atwood turned so sharply that he almost faced his companion.

"Do you mean that you have not yet spoken to your husband?"

"Not yet: I shall to-night."

"Thank Heaven!" said Mr. Atwood fervently. "Thank Heaven, my dear child! Celeste, your good angel has watched over you."

She laughed mirthlessly.

"Over me!—me! If I have such an one, 'peradventure he sleepeth, or he is on a journey.' If an innocent woman was ever delivered into the hands of the unrighteous, I have been that one."

"No, you are saved, you and your chil-

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dren. Celeste, your husband must never know of your discovery."

Celeste looked up in amazement. "Leave him and give no reason! It would not be possible."

"No, that would not be possible; but this will. You must go back to your home and your husband, resolved to pick up your life in silence where you meant to lay it down. It is your only chance for happiness, and for your children's future."

As she grasped his meaning, Celeste withdrew from him with a gesture almost of abhorrence.

"Do you realize what this is that you are telling me to do?" she asked. "I who have never known what a lie was! You are telling me to live one from now until I die — to make my whole life a mask — to act a part day by day and hour by hour."

Her eyes filled with passionate tears. Her voice broke.

"It is your hard part to play," said Mr. Atwood slowly, "but you will play it."

"Never!"

"You will play it for your children and

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for your children's father. Where others love to remember, you must learn to forget. Where others unfold their heart's secrets, you must wrap yours away. It will be cruelly hard at first. It will tax all your strength, all your high spirit; but you will succeed."

"Let me understand," said Celeste in a repressed voice, "just what this is which you are mapping out for me."

"I want you to wipe yesterday and to-day out of your life, letting no one suspect—hardly admitting to yourself—that they have made a difference. Train yourself to forget, and forgiveness will follow."

Celeste shook her head.

"No, I could never forget. I can forgive, but it must be from a distance. I cannot live with him. I cannot be his wife and the mother of his children."

"Yet you are both, irreparably. You have put your hand to the plough, and you may not look back. You have come out from your people and formed a household of your own. You have no moral right now to let it drop apart."

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"And you think it could be bound together with a lie?"

Mr. Atwood smiled.

"There spoke your Puritan grandparents. The Truth—the Te-ruth, in two syllables—a trifle through the nose—and at any cost. Why not the Truth of Saint Francis: 'Better to withhold than to speak unkindly'? Let me ask you one question. You have assured me that your husband cares for no other woman—but does he still care for you?"

"Can you call this caring?"

"Perhaps. I know that yours was a love-match to begin with. Would you have said yesterday, before this discovery, that there had been a change in your husband?"

"No-o," she answered hesitatingly; "there had been no change on the surface."

"And you?"

He felt her arm tremble in his. There was no answer, and he repeated his question. Her voice faltered perceptibly.

"Can you wonder that my respect is dead?"

And your affection?"

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"I told you that my respect was dead. My love could never live without respect to feed it."

"And yet I have known fatally numerous cases that thrive on less, and without the excuse of marriage. I am not asking if you forgive or if you respect. I ask if you still care for your husband as he is?"

The rain dropping monotonously on the umbrella was the only break in the silence. Celeste spoke wearily at last.

"Yes, I still care. But it only makes it all harder—more impossible—more miserable."

She broke down suddenly, weeping softly.

"Oh, I have loved him—and indeed, he loved me. I would have given him everything. How could he—ah! How could he wreck it all!"

Mr. Atwood let her weep on in silence, until her self-control again asserted itself. Then he spoke.

"There shall be no wreck, dear child. Take courage : you will come to the rescue. If I could promise you your first ideal of love and life, I would. As it is, I can only help you to a second best, and with nar-

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rower limits perhaps. But then the worm has to be content in its chestnut, and what are we but worms?"

"How good you are, and how you understand!" she whispered. "I will try — indeed, I will try. Whatever you tell me I will do," she added humbly.

Mr. Atwood's eyelids dropped for a moment. He bent over Celeste's bowed head, and opened his lips to speak; then, with a sudden change, laid his hand on hers, drawing it farther through his arm. He turned in the direction opposite to the one which they were taking.

"Then our first steps in the right path will be toward home," he said cheerfully. "We can reach it quickly from here by cross-streets, and my first orders are very practical. You are to put on dry slippers and a warm gown, and to send for a cup of hot tea."

She smiled sadly. "If that were all! And then?"

"Then the next is practical also, if not so easy. This leakage of your property must be stopped at once."

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Celeste made an impatient gesture. "That is the last point to consider."

"No, it is the first. Remember, I have known your husband as long as you have, perhaps longer; and I know him as one man knows another. He will not enter into obligations with no means of meeting them: he did not before marrying you. When he comes to you again, you must speak as lovingly and gently as you can, but with decision. Tell him you feel it is wronging his children to transfer so large sums on the judgment of one mind; that you would be more content if some one else were consulted — any one he chooses to name, provided he have knowledge on such subjects. The objection would be too reasonable, the condition too generous, to be cavilled at. He will consent, and, if I know him at all, suggest that you name a friend of your own. In that case, the person most natural for you to mention would be myself. He will not be likely to lay a reinvestment before me of which I would not approve."

There was no sarcasm in his voice, and

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she looked up with quick humiliation to read it in his face, but in vain. With a sudden realization that this was the initiation of her part, she uttered a broken exclamation, as of physical pain.

“No, no, it is impossible : you overrate my strength.”

As Mr. Atwood looked down at what had been a face formed for all that was hopeful and loving, and saw it now, twisted with emotion, his eyebrows contracted, and a curious deep cleft grew between them. He spoke with extreme gentleness :—

“Celeste, if there were any other way in the world, I should never insist on one which is so repugnant to you, but there is no other. If you destroy your husband's belief in your belief in him, you rob him of anything to live up to in life. When you withdraw the keystone of his self-respect, you set that of his ruin. He could never look you in the face again. You would lose everything and gain nothing. Your strength is to sit still. And besides ”—

He paused and hesitated, then smiled the kindly, half-whimsical smile peculiar to him.

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"I may as well say it. Suppose, to-day, every loving wife in the world confessed to her husband the exact estimate at which she rated his characteristics in the tribunal of her secret soul, how many homes would be left standing to-morrow do you think? We demand that our women admire us, Celeste. It is an innocent vanity, but I wonder if you know how deep its roots are?"

Again Celeste smiled sadly.

"You have conquered once more," she said, sighing, "and none too soon. There are my doorsteps. Yes, I will try, and if I fail, or if I succeed, I shall be ever grateful to you."

"You will not fail. Nature did not give you that prominent little chin for nothing, my child."

"No," she answered thoughtfully, "I think that I shall not fail."

They walked up the wet marble steps in silence. Mr. Atwood rang the bell, and they stood in the sheltered vestibule, with that strangeness already creeping in which must come sooner or later after hearts have been laid open.

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"There is one thing more," said Mr. Atwood ; "all that has been said by you to me and by me to you under this circle of gingham must be closed with its closing — and forever. I shall never refer to it again, nor must you."

"I understand," she answered simply.

The servant's footsteps sounded within, coming down the hallway toward the door. Celeste held out her hand, and as he took it in his, with a gesture which had no touch of gallantry in it, Mr. Atwood raised it to his lips.

"You will succeed," he repeated. The door opened — the harness of conventionality was adjusted.

"You will come in ?" said Celeste, with an interrogation which meant nothing.

"No," he responded in the same manner, "not now. Remember, Celeste, dry shoes and a warm gown and a cup of hot tea."

"I shall forget nothing."

He hurried her gently through the open door.

"And you are not to stand in the draught, either," he added, smiling. "Farewell" —

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“Farewell,” she replied. Her lips opened as if she would have spoken further, but the door was closed.

Mr. Atwood stood for a moment on the doorsteps outside. His lower lip was caught between his teeth, and the upper one curled slightly. The same curious cleft appeared between his brows.

“No, I shall never forgive him,” he muttered as he descended the steps; “never — but you will. It was not about a woman that he lied to you.”

LINK II.

HIS I. O. U.

*The chain
twists.*



LINK II.*

HIS I. O. U.

Dramatis Personæ: MR. ATWOOD and
ALINE, his ward.

Time: A first of April. Morning.

ACT I.

The curtain rises on a lawyer's office, the walls lined with sad-colored books, the shelves tipped with dark green leather and brass-headed tacks, once bright, but now succumbing to the prevailing neutral tint. The heavy mahogany chairs are covered with the same dark leather. The green felt top of the desk at which MR. ATWOOD is discovered sitting is black where the ink spots are new, rusty where they are old, and half covered by papers and pamphlets.

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The April sunshine sifts in through an open window at the left of the desk, and falls on a deep chair placed there. A door at the back of the room opens softly.

(Enter ALINE, dressed as a school-girl. She moves timidly across the floor, and pauses before the desk.)

Aline. I knew you would not be very angry with me. Are you?

Mr. Atwood (looking up with a start, and dropping his pen). Aline!

Aline (tremulously). Are you very angry?

Mr. Atwood (thrusting back his chair and rising). Angry, my dear child! No. *(He moves to her side, taking her hand in both his.)* But why did you not send for me to come to you? And we must not leave Madame Armand outside in this fashion. *(He walks toward the door as he speaks.)*

Aline (hurriedly). You needn't look for her. She's not there. I—I have run away.

Mr. Atwood (turning sharply, his hand still on the lock). What!

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Aline (faintly). I have run away.

Mr. Atwood (opening the door, throws a hasty direction into the outer room). Admit no one. Engaged on important business. No one, you understand. (*ALINE stands alone by the desk. She shrinks back as MR. ATWOOD closes the door and approaches her.*)

Mr. Atwood (reassuringly). What is it, my child? What has happened?

Aline (gaspingly). Nothing.

Mr. Atwood. You must not be afraid tell me. I am not angry, my dear.

Aline (raising her hand to her throat and compressing it slightly). I wouldn't speak to me in that way, if I were you.

Mr. Atwood. I did not mean to be stern.

Aline. I didn't think you were. I meant that if you speak to me so kindly, I shall cry, and I don't want to. (*MR. ATWOOD draws her hand from her throat and holds it in his, stroking it soothingly.*)

Mr. Atwood (smiling). Shall I scold you, then? If nothing has happened, I am afraid that is your guardian's duty.

Aline (glancing up quickly). If you scold me, I shall surely cry.

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Mr. Atwood. Then I had better say nothing about it just now. How did you find your way to my office?

Aline. I knew your address, and I came in a cab.

Mr. Atwood. Alone!

Aline. Why not?

Mr. Atwood (anxiously). My child, that must not happen again. Send for me, and I will come to you at any hour of the day or night. You know that.

Aline. I did not think you would mind the cab. I was not afraid.

Mr. Atwood. But I am. Tell me, what will Madame Armand say when she knows that you have run away from her to your stern guardian?

Aline. You are not stern.

Mr. Atwood. Ah, you do not know me. I am going to be very stern now.

Aline (with a quick glance). You couldn't. *(She smiles.)*

Mr. Atwood (smiling also, and shaking his head). No, I'm afraid you are right. But you have not yet told me what Madame Armand is going to say to this escapade?

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Aline. Nothing — she won't know. I slipped away so cleverly.

Mr. Atwood (cautiously). Then you did not mean to run away for good?

Aline (laughing). Oh, no; did you think so? I only wanted to see you quite alone. I had something to say to you.

Mr. Atwood (with a breath of relief). Ah! Shall you be afraid when you go back to Madame Armand, if she should find you out, Aline?

Aline. No-o. But she won't.

Mr. Atwood. I am afraid we shall have to take her into our confidence, my child.

Aline. You are not going to tell her of me?

Mr. Atwood. I am going to take you back to her myself. But she shall say nothing to you. I promise you that. I will come to the school to-night, and you shall then see me entirely alone, and tell me all you want; but I must take you back to Madame Armand — and at once, Aline!

Aline. You are going to drive me away?

Mr. Atwood. I am going to drive you away in a carriage, with myself on the seat beside you, that's all.

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Aline (passionately withdrawing from him). If you send me away now, I will never come back to you. I am not a baby. I won't be taken home by my hand, and have my nurse told not to scold me. I am going back alone. *(As she reaches the door Mr. Atwood follows and detains her.)*

Mr. Atwood (gravely). Stay, Aline. I will listen now, my dear. *(She resists for a moment, but is conquered by a flood of excited tears. Mr. Atwood leads her to the arm-chair by the window.)*

Mr. Atwood. Sit here and rest, first.

Aline (rubbing her eyes with her hands childishly). May I take off my h-hat?

Mr. Atwood. Of course you may. See, here is my chair close by yours, and here am I in it. Now, what is it? *(He unties her ribbons, lays the hat on the floor, and seats himself in a chair near ALINE.)*

Aline (still brokenly). I want to know what you are going to do with me?

Mr. Atwood. Do with you?

Aline. Yes; you are not going to do what Madame Armand says, are you?

Mr. Atwood. What does she say?

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Aline (indignantly). That I am to spend next winter with her, and that she is to take me out into what she calls "de world" — and that you said so.

Mr. Atwood (frowning slightly). Madame Armand should have let me tell you my plans. Why do you object, Aline?

Aline. Then you did say it.

Mr. Atwood. Madame Armand knows the world, and could show it to you very well and pleasantly. She has done so with many other girls. And you like her, do you not? I thought so.

Aline. I have not minded learning from her, but is that to be my home?

Mr. Atwood. It has been your home for many years. You called it that just now yourself.

Aline. She can't even say home in her language. That's not a home. It's only the place I live.

Mr. Atwood. Doesn't that mean home?

Aline (reproachfully). You know it does not.

Mr. Atwood (smiling). No, not always, I admit. I have no home myself, you

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know, outside of my club. But I thought you were happy with Madame Armand.

Aline. I was quite willing to go to school to her, but next year will be different. I shall be a woman then, and I did not think I should have to wait longer than that.

Mr. Atwood (perplexed). For what?

Aline. To live with you.

Mr. Atwood. With me, my dear!

Aline. If I had known only Madame Armand, it would have satisfied me, I suppose, but I was seeing you always, and always looking forward to our living together. You surely remember our plans?

Mr. Atwood (after a moment's silence). Tell me them over again, Aline.

Aline (surprised). Why, you used to be saying it over and over again whenever you came to see me. You used to say we should live together in a little house, and that you would never marry, and I should keep the house for you. Surely you have not forgotten!

Mr. Atwood. When and where did we last speak of that, Aline?

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Aline. In the garden at Madame's summer home. You were sitting on a bench, and you lifted me on your knee, and we even decided on our furniture.

Mr. Atwood (rising, and looking out of the window, his back to ALINE). And you never remember my saying this after you grew too old to be perched on my knee?

Aline. No, but I never forgot it. That has always been *home* to me. Why don't you speak to me? I believe you don't want me.

Mr. Atwood (turning quickly). Dear child, you must never think that. (*He rests his hand on the back of her chair, looking down at her.*) How can I make you understand? You know about as much of the world as the roar of life out there in the street might tell you, and that is all.

Aline (eagerly). You could teach it to me — and far better than Madame Armand.

Mr. Atwood. No; here I have only a tiny corner of life to show you, and see how I stammer and stutter over it. (*He seats himself again by ALINE, and covers her hands, which lie in her lap, with his own.*)

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Tell me, my dear, did you ever see just such a household as you describe? Did you ever hear or read of one? Run over your schoolmates' lives — what became of them as they went out from the school?

Aline (sadly). That is not the same thing. They all had a father or a mother to go to, or at least an uncle or an aunt. I have never had any one but you, and now I do think you don't want me. (*She tries to withdraw her hands.* MR. ATWOOD *holds them fast.*)

Mr. Atwood (earnestly). Aline, I do want you. What would give me greater happiness than to keep you with me always, and have you care for me, and I for you? I have no home either, you know. Do you suppose I am never lonely? Remember all that, and then realize how hard it must be for me to say no.

Aline (tearfully). Then what makes you say it?

Mr. Atwood (very gently). Think a moment, dear child. I am an old man to you, but the world still calls me young; and you are a child to me, but the world would call

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you a woman. We are too young and too old, and we cannot possibly stretch out the years between us, try as we might. Do you understand now? Look about your own small world, and you will see that kind of household only belonging to married people.

Aline (sobbing). Then why don't you marry me?

Mr. Atwood (dropping ALINE's hands and rising hastily). My dear child (*he continues with effort*), I must have done very wrongly, but it was without intention to deceive or play on your feelings. I drew a pathetic picture of a homeless life which does not exist, and of a loneliness which is not mine. I am neither lonely nor unhappy. I am not even uncomfortable, and you must not feel sorry for me, Aline. (*ALINE sobs on, and MR. ATWOOD continues entreatingly.*) Suppose I were to marry you, my dear. Can't you see that I should be doing a very wicked thing?

Aline (brushing away her tears). No, you would not be wicked. If you knew how I hated the thought of being with Madame Armand, you wouldn't say so.

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Mr. Atwood (his expression relaxing suddenly into relief and amusement). Child, what an unnecessary scare you gave me. Come, dry your eyes, and we will talk it all over. What a watery little woman it is! See how you have tear-stained your white glove. It is quite wet. Let me pull it off for you. (*He sits down again and draws her glove from her hand, finger by finger.*) Now we will talk this all out comfortably, and leave nothing to think of afterward. Did you suppose I could be tempted into robbing baby carriages? And what a baby you are, Aline!

Aline (with dignity). I shall be eighteen very soon.

Mr. Atwood. And I shall be two score in a few years. How would you like being hampered with a gray-haired husband then?

Aline. I should like it dearly.

Mr. Atwood (hastily). You don't know what you would like when you are a woman. Do you know what even my best friends would say? That I had kept a little heiress in a pill-box, and married her before

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she had a chance to peep out ; and it would be quite true.

Aline (impatiently). If having money is only to make me unhappy, I shall give it all to Madame Armand the day I come of age.

Mr. Atwood (gravely). Even then, my child, it would not be honourable for me to marry you.

Aline (reproachfully). And you care more for that than for me ?

Mr. Atwood. No ; you have been as my own child for so many years, that I am afraid, if your happiness and my honour were put in the scales, my honour would kick the beam. But it is your happiness that I am considering now ; for I could not make you happy, try as I might.

Aline. Why not ?

Mr. Atwood (decidedly). Because you do not love me.

Aline. I do love you.

Mr. Atwood. No, you do not, or you would be less sure of it, and you would not tell me so. You are fond of me, as I am of you, but you do not love me, my dear.

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Aline. What is the difference ?

Mr. Atwood (smiling). You will know some day, and then I will let you marry him.

Aline. How shall I know ?

Mr. Atwood. Ah, that was just the order of question I wanted to leave Madame Armand to answer.

Aline. No ; tell me yourself.

Mr. Atwood. Well, first of all, you will know without asking, and deny it, even to yourself. You will stand in the shadow of a needle, and fancy yourself concealed. You will be troubled when with him, and miserable when away from him. And then I will give you to him, and not before.

Aline. But I am miserable at the thought of being away from you.

Mr. Atwood. You are miserable at the thought of being with Madame Armand. Tell me the truth, Aline, do you ever miss me after I leave you ?

Aline. Indeed I do.

Mr. Atwood. How much, and for how long ?

Aline (thoughtfully). I don't have much

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time between lessons, but I want you to come back soon, and I always cry until the class-bell rings after you go. (MR. ATWOOD *stoops and kisses her hand with exaggerated gallantry.*)

Mr. Atwood. That is good of you, Aline ; you miss me more than I thought, my dear. But some day, although your eyes may cry less, your heart will cry more. You won't want him back *soon*, but at once and forever. And no lesson-books nor class-bells on earth will be able to make you forget. Then you will remember your old guardian's words, and laugh at the idea of loving him.

Aline. No ; for indeed I do love you.

Mr. Atwood (tenderly). I know you do, and I love you dearly, my child. We are not ashamed to confess our loves, are we ? There lies the defect.

Aline. You don't love me, or you wouldn't let me be so unhappy.

Mr. Atwood. You are not to be unhappy.

Aline. I shall be unhappy with Madame Armand.

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Mr. Atwood. You are not to be left with Madame Armand.

Aline (radiantly). You mean to keep me yourself, after all?

Mr. Atwood. Practically, since you are foolish enough to want me. I don't see it all quite clearly yet, but do you think you would like to live with my sister?

Aline. With your sister? I thought you said —

Mr. Atwood. I will take a house for you both near my own rooms. She is a widow, you know, and, being quite as mistaken as yourself regarding me, will do all I wish. You will see me every day, and oftener, perhaps. That will be your own home, and my second home. Will that satisfy you?

Aline (starting to her feet). You are in earnest?

Mr. Atwood (rising also). In dead earnest!

Aline. I can't, no, I can't believe it.

Mr. Atwood (laughing). Shut your eyes and try hard, and, whatever you do, don't cry again. You have been a naughty child, and gotten all you cried for. Now be good,

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and thank me prettily. (*ALINE, with a cry of delight, clasps her hands on his arm and lifts her face, offering him her lips.* *MR. ATWOOD looks at her and hesitates. He lays his finger lightly on her lips.*) No; we will keep those for the lover to come. You are pleased, then? You want nothing more? Think, now, while I am in the melting mood.

Aline (knitting her brows with difficulty). I don't think of anything more that I could want.

Mr. Atwood (quizzically). Not even me?

Aline. You said I should see you.

Mr. Atwood. And you don't want to marry me now?

Aline (shyly). I do, if you want me to. You have been so good.

Mr. Atwood. Aline, confess the truth. Now that you have escaped Madame Armand, you want to throw me over. You never loved me at all.

Aline. It was you who said that. I told you I did.

Mr. Atwood. In the past tense already, I vow! *Do* you?

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Aline (hanging her head). If all that you told me just now is true, then perhaps I don't.

Mr. Atwood (laughing aloud). Very well, then, I shall never ask you to marry me again. I have been refused by a chit of seventeen, on this first day of April.

Aline (looking at him thoughtfully). You have been so good to me. Will you take me home now? (*She moves apart from him, and speaks softly, lowering her eyes.*) I shall love you forever for what you did then. But all the same —

Mr. Atwood (looks at her keenly. Aside). Have I said too much? (*Aloud.*) Here is your hat, Aline. (*He lifts her hat from the floor and watches her tie it on. ALINE avoids his eyes. They move to the door, which MR. ATWOOD opens. As he stands aside for her to pass out, ALINE glances back over her shoulder.*)

Aline (mischievously). You must never tell any one that I offered myself to you, you know.

Mr. Atwood (following her). Aline !

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE : *the same.*

Time : One year later.

Curtain rises on MR. ATWOOD seated at his desk, looking at the calendar he holds in his hand. The date marked is April 1st. He lays down the calendar thoughtfully, draws his paper toward him, dips his pen in the ink, and begins to write. The door at the back of the room opens softly.

(Enter ALINE, dressed in walking-costume. She crosses the floor on tiptoe, and stands laughing at the other side of the desk.)

Aline. How angry are you this time ?
(As MR. ATWOOD looks up and attempts to rise, she motions him back.) Don't move ; I am coming to you. *(She rounds the desk and drops in a chair by his side. Still laughing and holding out her hand.)* You have not bade me good-morning yet.

Mr. Atwood (holding the hand she offers).
Aline, you are incorrigible. How did you get here this time ?

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Aline. In the same way, — a cab. Now, why don't you scold?

Mr. Atwood. Because I cannot, and you know it. This is a flagrant abuse of power. Is my sister in town?

Aline. Oh, no, she is at the seaside, where you left her.

Mr. Atwood (reproachfully). And where I left you.

Aline. I know; I have run away again. I took the early train this morning. I wanted to see you.

Mr. Atwood. I should be more than human to scold now. That was cleverly done, Aline. What do you want? Experience, alas, has taught you that you have only to ask.

Aline. I wanted to see you —'

Mr. Atwood. You saw me three days ago.

Aline. I wanted to see you again. Are you busy?

Mr. Atwood. No; as usual, I am at your disposal.

Aline. You were writing when I came in.

Mr. Atwood. Did you expect to find me

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kicking my heels? No; to tell the truth, if a penny postage-stamp had been put on my thoughts, I am afraid you would have received them.

Aline (opening her purse laughingly, selects a coin, which she lays on the table). A penny for your thoughts, then, as you have put your price on them.

Mr. Atwood (taking possession of the coin, and laughing also). I will give you an I. O. U. See here. *(He takes up his pen and writes rapidly. ALINE looks over his shoulder.)*

Mr. Atwood (reads). "I. O. U. my thoughts, to be delivered in ripe season." Does that answer? *(ALINE takes the paper, folds it, and lays it away in her reticule with mock carefulness.)*

Mr. Atwood (watching her). And now what? I am not vain enough to believe that you only wanted to see me. Let me think. You were afraid I would buy your new dining-room table without you, after all. Is that it?

Aline. I told you I didn't care about selecting it.

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Mr. Atwood. And I told you I would not buy it without you. I am a creature of habit. The old table is just right. Suppose your new table proved too wide for you to hand my coffee-cup across yourself? I should never dine with you again, if you invited me every night. You must go with me and test it.

Aline. Indeed I shall not. What would the cabinet-maker think?

Mr. Atwood. He would think me an old fool, I imagine, and (*pausing and looking at ALINE*) I fear he would be quite right. I must content myself by taking him the measurement, I suppose. But come, Aline, I want you to sit over there in the arm-chair by the window, where you sat the first time you came here, one year ago to-day. I have held it sacred to you since then. (*He leads ALINE to the arm-chair, and seats himself near her.*) I sat just here, opposite to you, did I not? But then you were my obedient ward—and to-day I am your obedient guardian.

Aline (lifting her hat from her head and laying it on her knee). You have not told

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me that I might take off my hat yet, and you did the time before. (*She passes her hands over her hair.*)

Mr. Atwood (smiling). Mark the year's difference! Then you humbly asked my permission. To-day you don't wait for it. Time flies, but we fly also. Are you satisfied with the changes of your year, Aline?

Aline (using the crown of her hat as a cushion for her bonnet-pins, thrusting them in and out as she talks). Yes, I am satisfied; but your sister is not satisfied for me.

Mr. Atwood. What displeases her?

Aline. That I am not married.

Mr. Atwood (quickly). Did she say that to you?

Aline. Not that exactly, but I know how anxious she is to see me settled. She thinks I am in danger of throwing myself away, you know.

Mr. Atwood. Why?

Aline (indifferently). Oh, because I am wealthy, and because I am pretty.

Mr. Atwood (laughing). You know that you are wealthy, because I could not well

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keep that from you. But how do you know you are pretty?

Aline (demurely). I have been told so.

Mr. Atwood. I never told you so.

Aline (looking up at him and raising her eyebrows). You are telling me so now.

Mr. Atwood. What kind of discipline does this show? You ought to stand in awe of me, Aline.

Aline. I do sometimes. I was horribly afraid of you the night before I left home. I was afraid you would be angry as your sister was.

Mr. Atwood. Was she angry with you — and why?

Aline (thrusting the pins into her hat and looking down). Because I *couldn't* do what she wanted me to — you remember. I was afraid to tell you I had sent him away, because I knew you wanted it so much, too; but, indeed, I had tried my very best.

Mr. Atwood (leaning toward her). And you thought I should be angry! that I wanted you to marry!

Aline. But you did, did you not? You

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kept asking him here and there, and making me go places with him I didn't want to.

Mr. Atwood. No, Aline, I did not want you to marry him. When you told me you could not, I was indecently happy to hear it.

Aline. Then why did you feel one way and act another? Of course I misunderstood you.

Mr. Atwood. Can you see no reason?

Aline. I call it very unreasonable.

Mr. Atwood (earnestly). No, he had everything to offer you, — strength of body and mind, a real devotion, I think, wealth, position — and youth. I determined he should have every chance, but as for wishing it — no, Aline. (*He rises and moves to the desk, where he unlocks a drawer and takes from it a long white glove, which he hands ALINE.*) You left it here in your last visit. Do you remember?

Aline (puzzled, and turning the glove over). No — why, yes, I do remember. I searched everywhere for it afterward, and finally threw away the mate. Why did you not give me this before?

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Mr. Atwood. I have not given it to you now.

Aline (turning the glove over again; laughs). It may not be wasted after all, as it happens to be a right-hand glove. This will do for my wedding-day. Keep it for me. When I want it I will ask you for it. (*MR. ATWOOD takes the glove from her and puts it in his pocket silently.*)

Aline (laughing). How seriously you take it!

Mr. Atwood. I am thinking of the confession I have to make to you. I was going down to the seaside to see you this afternoon.

Aline. But you wrote that you were very busy, and that you couldn't possibly come.

Mr. Atwood. And it was quite true.

Aline. Then how could you?

Mr. Atwood. I couldn't from that point of view, but I was coming. I wanted to see you.

Aline (mischievously). You saw me three days ago. That was your reply to me.

Mr. Atwood. I wanted to see you again. That was your answer.

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Aline. Then you do miss me a little?

Mr. Atwood (smiling). A little.

Aline. Only a little?

Mr. Atwood (taking her two hands in his, and raising them to his lips). I have not paid you that homage since the day when you last sat in this chair. You say that you have wanted me, Aline. Multiply that tenfold, and you will know how I was wanting you. I told you I was a creature of habit. Three days ago, when you left town, I turned back again to my old lines of life, and it was as if they had never fitted me. I had drifted from them, and in revenge they would not have me again. My old haunts were but places revisited. Do you know what I mean? What am I to do? I was coming to ask you.

Aline (touching the reticule at her side). Was that the thought you sold me?

Mr. Atwood. That and something further. Will you present your paper now, Aline? I am more than ready to tell my thought.

Aline. Let me tell something first. I was not quite honest when I said I came

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for nothing. (*She turns her face from him as she continues, speaking softly.*) Last year, when I sat in this chair, you told me that if I really cared, I would be so unhappy in a separation that nothing could make me forget —

Mr. Atwood (eagerly). Yes?

Aline (her face still averted). And that I then would learn the difference between — just being fond of some one and something else.

Mr. Atwood (bending nearer, and half circling her with his arm). Go on, Aline.

Aline. And that when my eyes cried less than my heart, I would understand.

Mr. Atwood. And now, dear?

Aline (turning to him suddenly, and hiding her face against his arm). You told me that if I cared really I couldn't say it, and I don't think I can say it at all.

Mr. Atwood. Then let me say it for you, Aline.

Aline. That was what I came for. When we were separated, then I knew, as you said I would — Will you bring him back to me? (*MR. ATWOOD bends over her in silence.*)

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As ALINE attempts to rise he gently prevents her by laying his hand on her head. Once his lips touch her hair, and then he releases her and stands beside her. ALINE, rising also, glances up at him eagerly. As she clasps her hands appealingly on his arm, he looks down at her.)

Mr. Atwood (slowly). Yes, I will bring him back to you.

Aline (anxiously). You are not vexed with me?

Mr. Atwood. No, my child.

Aline. And you will still love me?

Mr. Atwood. Always, Aline. *(As she still clings to him he rouses with effort.)* All is as it should be; I shall do my part. I will give you to him as I promised, and dance at your wedding, dear. Are you satisfied?

Aline. How good you are to me. *(She lifts her face, offering him her lips.)*

Mr. Atwood (framing her face in his hands). No, those are not for me, Aline. *(As he releases her and turns away, a rap at the door calls him. MR. ATWOOD crosses the room and opens the door to receive a card which is handed in to him. He reads it and*

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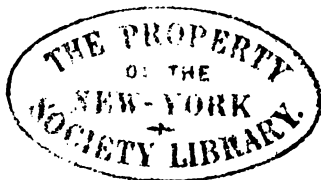
then looks at ALINE. Returning to her side, he speaks steadily.) Aline, some one is waiting to see me in the outer office—some one who can offer you a great deal, my dear,—an honourable name, an eager devotion, and the pride of strength and youth. He asks me if I can spare him a few moments. What shall I tell him, dear? Shall I say that I will spare him far more than that—and that it is waiting for him here? *(He takes her glove from his pocket, and holds it toward her.)* Take your glove if that is to be my answer. *(As ALINE, with bowed head, holds out her hand, MR. ATWOOD lays the white glove across her palm, and, gently opening her reticule, draws out the written form. As he passes the open window on his way from the room, he pauses to tear the paper into fragments, fluttering the white scraps out into the air.)*

CURTAIN.

LINK III.

THE NOTE REDEEMED.

*Turn, Fortune,
turn thy wheel.*



LINK III.

THE NOTE REDEEMED.

MY DEAR GUARDIAN, — Won't you drink tea with me to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock ? You are such a stranger, that I am obliged to hunt you up, not only for the pleasure of seeing you, but because I want to consult you upon my own affairs.

Affectionately yours,

ALINE.

Mr. Atwood did not use a book for memoranda. His pockets were always filled with letters, which served the same purpose for him. These he destroyed as the appointments they made were fulfilled. He had drawn a sheaf of envelopes from his pocket to shuffle them over and find Aline's note, which he laid on her drawing-room fire. He was watching it blaze as she entered.

"How glad I am to see you!" she said, giving him her hand. "All this winter you have been neglecting me. I am thinking

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of reporting you to the Orphan's Court. Do you know, I have not seen you in these ten days, and then I find you burning my *billet-doux* on my own fire. There are some people who treasure every line I write."

"One at a time, Aline," Mr. Atwood remonstrated. "First, you are no longer my ward. You were eighteen three birthdays ago. You see I have an uncivil memory. Secondly, I am not 'some people.' What do you hear from HIM?"

Aline turned away to the tea-table.

"Let us have our tea before we talk of my affairs," she said, seating herself. Mr. Atwood drew his chair by the corner of the table near her.

"Let us sip and talk," he amended, taking the full teacup Aline handed him, "unless this is a pretext for delay. Have you a confession which you are afraid to open to me?"

Aline flushed as she bent over her bowl of silver.

"No," she replied, "I am not afraid — take this spoon: it is my prettiest. I wanted to consult you about my engagement."

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"Your engagement! I have already joined your hands with Archie's, and blessed you. I am prepared to give you away when the day is appointed. What more can I do?"

"Nothing: this is a matter of undoing. I have decided to break my engagement."

Mr. Atwood set down his half-emptied cup on the table, pushing it from him.

"You are wiser than I, my child," he said. "The tea should have been drunk first if it were to be finished. What fancy is this, Aline?"

"A very practical one."

"Are matters going wrong practically? My last letter from Archie was not very brilliant, poor boy, — why should it be? — but he spoke confidently of the future."

Aline moved her chair back impatiently.

"The future! I am sick of the future. I want a little present. You said just now that your memory was uncivil. You know my age. I know it. I grow a week older each day, I think, and so much more tired."

Mr. Atwood also moved his chair from the table, drawing it nearer Aline.

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"Go on," he said gravely, "and speak more plainly, Aline."

"How much more plainly can I speak? I am tired, bored, *ennuyé* beyond bearing. The French understand. Did you ever read '*Privat S'embête*'? They know it means more than a fancy."

Mr. Atwood sat with his eyes fastened on his ward's face. His brows were drawn together.

"Did you learn that with Madame Armand?"

Aline laughed. "Perhaps. Madame has her own methods. She managed me — to a fault, shall I say? She would talk to me 'like a mother;' those were her words. Shall I repeat to you one of her favorite homilies? 'My child, you must be more studious. You are quite right. I do demand more of you than I myself have. I — no, it is the age that demands. To-day is not yesterday. A woman must now do more than amuse. In my youth it was otherwise. You wish to marry well? Of course, all women wish to do that. Well, the standard is raised. Marriage is more

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of a double harness. That is all. Learn, my child.' And I learned. Why should Archie and I drag on longer together? He is fretting his soul out off there. It is this separation from me, the thought of me and my future, which frets him. What use could I be to him in his life as it must stand for years to come? The truth is, I was created as an ornament of society merely, and as such I feel that I have been broken. I keep turning out my unblemished side to the world."

Mr. Atwood bent forward to take Aline's hand in his. His face had relaxed to the point of smiling. "My dear, unless you want me to be rude, and say to you, *no, no, not broken, only a little cracked*, you must be somewhat more definite. Let me see if I can tell your story to you. This is the way I read it. Archie has had some drawbacks over which he has brooded to the extent of writing to you and suggesting that he will not bind you longer. Perhaps the letter is too honest to show you how little his heart really means you to act upon this. Is that it?"

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Aline withdrew her hand.

"No, that is not it. I have had no such letter, and I believe no such thought ever crossed Archie's brain. If he had been able to stay here with me, after his financial shipwreck, it might have been different; as it is"—

"The shipwreck was as unexpected as it was undeserved," Mr. Atwood interposed.

"I know. I am not blaming him. It is fate; just as it is fate that I was not educated for a poor man's wife. I have no talent for domesticity. Why should I? Was there anything at Madame Armand's school to develop it? I remember no other home until you created this one for me. Yesterday I sat down with my life and looked at it squarely to see only a spreading desert of weariness. I will not bear it. Now do you understand me?"

Mr. Atwood did not immediately reply. He had lifted his teaspoon, and was examining its carving, from the monogram in the bowl to the figure on the handle. He looked up as Aline ended.

"I fear I do," he replied slowly. "Who gave you this, Aline? It is new, I think."

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"Yes," she replied quietly. "Mr. McHenry gave it to me last week. He has returned from Munich, you know." A dash of red came and faded in her cheeks.

Mr. Atwood again looked down at the spoon. "Yes," he replied dryly, "I know. I thought I recognised the Munich Child, — emblem of innocence. Aline, perhaps I have been somewhat to blame in this matter. When the crash came you were more than ready to throw yourself and your fortune into the breach. Archie refused your offer, but had I supported him less strongly, I think you might have gained your point. You are not lacking in force. Both he and I thought it wiser for him to retrieve his fortunes alone, wiser for each of you. Suppose that I now withdraw my opposition, and advise an immediate marriage, what then? Your fortune would be an ample support for you both. Concerning future luxuries, Archie is not a man to be long held down by circumstances."

Aline lifted her eyebrows. Her shoulders followed them slightly.

"My fortune! While Archie is off there

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in no place to speak of, it is all well enough to talk of his being economical. Back in his old world, married to me, it would be impossible. My fortune would represent about the necessary pin-money for us. Our tastes are extravagant, or rather mine are, and Archie's are expensive. That sounds better."

"Aline, two years ago you did not know all this."

"That was two years ago. I have had time to learn. I know more of the world, more of myself."

Mr. Atwood was leaning back in his chair, his elbow resting on the table, his hand shading his eyes.

"What you have learned of the world, I can see," he replied. "What have you learned of yourself?"

"That I am a cold woman, incapable of deep feeling. When I hear good women sentimentalising, I feel like saying, 'Bah! what do you know about life outside of your four walls,—the life I need?' I would say it if my breeding were not a trifle stronger than my disgust. I have learned

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that luxuries are to me what bread and meat are to other, perhaps better, women. Is that the wife for a poor man ? ”

Mr. Atwood lifted his hand from his eyes.

“ Is it the wife for any man ? Aline, you do not realise what you are saying. To whom have you been talking, or what have you been reading ? ”

“ You think me reflecting some one else, do you not ? I am only showing you myself, as you asked me to do.”

“ And this is the child for whom I made myself responsible ! You were right, Aline. I have neglected my trust. You have taught me a lesson to-day. Yet I thought I knew you. You brought me your first childish troubles, your first school-girl disillusion, your dawning love-story, and now, thank God, you bring me your first contemplated sin. My dear, we must talk this over many times, and from all sides. I told you my guardianship was past. It is in law, but in affection it still exists. I can still expect your obedience. You must wait a month before deciding. Thirty days is not long to consider so grave a step.”

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For the first time Aline gave evidence of uneasiness. Her fingers interlaced nervously.

"It is too late," she said in a voice unsteady in spite of herself; "I have written."

Mr. Atwood rose to his feet and came to her side. He stood with his hand on the back of her chair.

"Aline," he asked sternly, "do you mean that you have written all this to Archibald Bracken, and sent your letter?"

She bowed her head, partly in assent, partly as if shrinking from the storm of his anger.

"What, then, did this mockery of consultation mean? At least have the courage of your actions, however unworthy. Look up and answer me."

She raised her head timidly. As her eyes met his, she burst into a sudden passion of tears, hiding her face in her hands. Mr. Atwood stood looking down at her in silence. As she still sobbed, he lifted his hand and, after a moment's hesitation, laid it tenderly on her hair.

"My poor little worldling," he said, "did

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you think me too harsh? My dear, a man does not forget twenty years in a day. May Archibald Bracken forget two years in an hour. That step is irretrievable. We both know him and know how he will accept it."

He sat down again, and drawing Aline's hands from her face, held them, all wet with tears, in his own. "Come," he said, "let us talk it over. You have taken your life from Archie and from me into these frail little hands for better or worse. That which is done is ended. We will pick up the broken threads and go on. What is your purpose, dear?"

As Aline moved to wipe her eyes with her handkerchief, Mr. Atwood, waiting for her reply, again took up the Munich spoon. "I do not suppose you mean to spend the rest of your life alone," he said; "I conclude you mean to marry" —

Aline's voice was still broken.

"Need we discuss that just yet — so soon?"

"I do not see why not. Subjects are as hard to reopen as wounds. This is wide now. We may as well discuss it to the

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bottom. We have always found it better to talk our talks out, you know. As you have turned from a marriage of the heart, I gather you mean to make one of the world."

"I surely shall not make an unworldly marriage."

"That is more delicately put, but we mean the same thing. It is a little difficult to be as delicate as we might wish under the circumstances. Suppose we bring the whole matter to a business level, and use business terms. It will be easier, I think. It was Archie's ill-fortune to own stock in a railroad which was reorganised. That is, it got into difficulties, and was bought in by a single man, with all its liabilities, for reselling. What would you think of looking on this as a personal reorganisation? You have fallen into difficulties. At this point, as a wise financier, you consult your lawyer. Together we brush up our road, and look about us for a new purchaser."

Aline crimsoned.

"You are cruel," she said bitterly.

"Dear child, I am only wording the facts, and wording them as tenderly as such facts

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can be set to language. Aline, tell me that you entered into this blindly, that you see it now as it is, for the first time."

Aline looked aside thoughtfully. Mr. Atwood bent forward, waiting her reply. He sank back in a chair again as she turned to him, her face set.

"No; I had not put my future in such plain terms, but you have for me. That is what it will be. I shall choose carefully, with your help. A woman can choose carefully who has no heart to rule her head. I do not see that I am wrong. I am what I am, and shall make the best of myself."

"And are you sure of this self-knowledge, Aline?"

"What do you think? Could a woman of another kind act as I have acted, speak as I have spoken? I have proved myself."

Mr. Atwood once more lifted the spoon, which seemed to fascinate him. He looked thoughtfully from it to Aline.

"Then, why dodge the bullets? You only turn from one into the path of another. Face the fire steadily if you are in earnest. Shall I go on?"

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“Go on !”

“Let us, then, look into the lives and fortunes of the most likely purchasers for our road. In this case the lives weigh more or less. At the moment I think of four comparatively suitable purchasers.”

He checked them off on his fingers, holding up his hand, — “Ward, Holloway, McHenry, and Ditson.”

“Mr. Ditson has no longer any interest in me,” Aline interrupted.

Mr. Atwood turned down one finger. “Your frankness is helpful, Aline ; all financiers are not so open, even with their confidential advisers. That leaves three, you see : of these, Ward has money, but no birth ; Holloway has birth, almost as much money, enough to balance the matter, I think, and knock Ward out.” He turned down another finger. “Clearing the decks in this way simplifies decision. That leaves two, Holloway and McHenry, both gentlemen, and with fortunes fairly equal, neither anything particularly aggressive for good or evil, as men go. I happen to know — and here you see the value of an adviser — that

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Holloway has a touch of the speculator's fever. Some day you might find yourself plus the man and minus the money. The game would be scarcely worth the candle ; McHenry has no such disqualification. Shall I turn Holloway down, Aline ? ”

Aline looked up at the two fingers he held raised before her, and then into his face. As her lips parted, Mr. Atwood bent toward her, gathering her into his arm before she could speak.

“ My child ! ” he cried, “ do you think I could so sell you to the highest bidder, even if you can sell yourself in a slave-market ? No — and yet — yes —. You know in these last years I have been fortunate in everything I touched. That I have grown wealthy, absurdly wealthy, you do not know. Aline, I could buy the four of those men twice over. I outbid them all. I have cared for you as my own child since your babyhood. Let it go on, with the difference only of a marriage service read over us. I do not offer you love as those others would. But do you want it ? I do not ask your love. You say you have, none to give. You have

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nothing to tell me, nothing to keep from me. Sell yourself to me, Aline, if you must be sold. With me, at least, I shall know you safe, and with me you have been happy."

Aline started back with her hand on his breast, thrusting him from her to stare into his face. Mr. Atwood read the incredulity of hers, and, withdrawing a little, lifted her hand to hold it gently between his own. "Aline, I do mean it," he said more gently, and as if answering her question. "I offer you that which I gave you in the past; no more nor less. It is for you to decide if that will satisfy you. I do not ask you to speak now. I wish you to wait. Sleep on it, wake on it, take as long as you will. My child, does an offer of marriage so agitate you? You are trembling from head to foot. Come, for to-day forget it! I left a glorious to-day outside. Go to your room and dress for a walk with me. We will take one of those sunset rambles we used to have in the old days. Come!"

He led her across the room to the door, through which, half laughingly, he almost thrust her, closing the wooden screen be-

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tween her gaze of unbroken wonder and himself.

Alone, he leaned heavily for a moment against the closed door, still grasping its handle. The smile had vanished from his face.

“And this,” he fairly groaned, “this is the woman whose hands clasp my heart, and she — God help me — she has none.”



LINK IV.

AN APPLE OF DISCORD.

*Seed, blossom,
and fruit.*

LINK IV.

AN APPLE OF DISCORD.

MARIE SEVERANCE was playing the jewsharp. She lay on her divan, her head propped against a bright yellow cushion, which shone through the dark network of her ruffled hair like an aureole. Her head was thrown back, that she might the better reach her mouth, to which she held the harp with one hand, while with the other she twanged its tongue, her feet beating time on the divan. For the rest, she had a French woman's face, and eyes that would have been blue had the black pupils been smaller. The jewsharp twanged, and the louder it sang, the deeper shone the eyes of Marie Severance. She did not hear a knock twice repeated, nor the final opening of the door.

"Is it over, Mrs. Severance?" said a voice near her.

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Marie dropped her harp with a little cry.

"Mr. Atwood, I am so glad you have come !"

"Judging from the pæan which drowned my knocks, I suppose it is well over," said Mr. Atwood, drawing nearer.

Marie held out both hands toward him. She made no effort to rise.

"Congratulate us!" she cried.

In spite of her French looks she spoke English with no accent.

"It is more than well; and to you we owe it all."

Mr. Atwood shook the offered hands warmly. Without waiting for an invitation, he drew a chair by the divan, seating himself.

"Begin at the beginning," he said; "tell me word for word. Have the babes in the woods at last found the way in this city of America?"

"The way to the way."

"Where is Malcolm?"

"I put on his hat and sent him out. He was too excited for twelve feet by fifteen to hold him. Oh, if you could have been here! if you could have heard!"

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"Did you hear? Were you in the room?"

Marie pointed to a great wooden shelf which ran all along the opposite side of the room, screened by a curtain falling from the ceiling like the upper berth of a sleeping-car. An upright ladder ran from the floor to the shelf. Mr. Atwood looked up and laughed.

"You hid there?"

"Yes; after almost a quarrel with Malcolm. He wanted me to go down-stairs and sit with our land-woman until the Master was gone. I will not call her a lady; for she comes up here in our absence touching everything; not to steal, you understand, but in vulgarest curiosity. I knew if I went down-stairs Malcolm would never tell me anything. The last time you asked the Master to look at his picture, I really heard nothing, except that he praised the execution, condemned the conception, and so" — She made a gesture as if wiping it all out. "With this new canvas I made up my mind I would hear for myself. I prayed Malcolm to let me lie on the shelf behind the curtain. I promised him I

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would not move. He would not hear of it. I should surely cough or sneeze, and then it would be worse than if I had stayed openly on the floor. I vowed I would do neither, and that I would stay. I wept and entreated, so at last he consented, but very discontentedly. He made me crawl up on the shelf long before the Master's coming, to be quite sure I was not caught by him. And then the Master was an hour late. Two hours did I lie there picking a little hole in the curtain to see through, and hearing Malcolm's 'Hist' at every sound I made. But when the Master came, that was worth all."

"He has fully approved?" asked Mr. Atwood, glancing towards a draped easel which stood at the other side of the room.

"Let me go on as it comes. He seated himself there on that stool before the picture, Malcolm standing just behind him, and I lying up there peeping down. For what seemed to me an eternity, he sat there silent—silent. I could hear him breathing. My poor husband grew whiter and whiter; for me, I could have screamed. I

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had to stuff the corner of the bedquilt which fell quite near me into my mouth. At last he did turn. He laid his hand on Malcolm's shoulder. 'You are to be congratulated,' he said."

"Bravo!" cried Mr. Atwood. "From that opinion there is no appeal; what else?"

"He staeied on for an hour, talking. 'You are on the right road,' he said; 'you will succeed. Work, work, work,—do nothing, think nothing else.' Malcolm was staggering when he came back into the room after letting him out. I was then only half-way down the ladder, and I thought I could fly to him. He just caught me in time. We were like crazy things. He startled me, he was so excited. I sent him out, while I"—

"You played the jewsharp," said Mr. Atwood. "Here he is again. 'All hail, Severance, thou shalt be king hereafter!'"

The door had opened to admit the owner of the studio, a young man of attractive personal appearance, with perceptive blue eyes, and a sensitive mouth. His decided

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chin seemed an odd ending to an otherwise dreamy face.

"Show me your picture again," Mr. Atwood went on. "I am but mortal, and it will be more beautiful to me now that the Master has approved."

Malcolm Severance seated himself deliberately on the nearest chair.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," he answered. "The picture is just what it was before. I suppose Marie has recounted our triumphs to you, and left me nothing to tell. I am doubly glad you came in just now. I wanted you to hear this, and also to consult you about two pictures I have had offers for."

It was apparent that he had not walked off his excitement; but he brought out the pictures, and talked them over with a self-control and grasp of money values that made Mr. Atwood smile.

"What an American you are, Severance!" he said; "if you had a grain less talent in this line, it would be a crying shame that you are lost to the business world. Show me another artist who can look at his work

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and make of it a neat sum in arithmetic, as you do."

Severance shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not all artist, thank Heaven!"

"Not always, you might say," Mr. Atwood amended. "When you get your palette in your hands, you are an artist to frenzy, but the minute you lay it down the frenzy goes with it. Mrs. Severance, what are you doing?"

Marie had risen from her divan to move quietly about the room. While the others talked she had taken the yellow cover from the table in the centre of the floor and replaced it by a white one. Like a squirrel visiting its hoards, she had gone from one hiding-place to another, bringing from each something for her table. Finally she opened the door of a small stove that stood in a corner, and drew out a leg of lamb of proportionate size. As Mr. Atwood turned to speak to her, he saw the well-spread board.

"Where did that come from?" he said. "I have always wished to be present at this operation, and now I have been here

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without knowing it. Severance, you surely have a clever wife. Look at this temperate feast, — sacrificial lamb at the head, consoling salad here, cheerful apples there, and wine to gladden the heart. Is this third plate for me ? ”

“ When your plate is not on the table, it shall wait there in the closet,” said Marie. “ Come, eat with us. All is ready.”

Mr. Atwood shook his head.

“ This mushroom table has upset my plans. Mrs. Severance, I was about to ask a favour of you. But first tell me why you have never shown any curiosity regarding my wife ? Did you know I had one ? ”

Marie laughed.

“ Yes, I knew so much as that. If you ask me why I never questioned you about her, I can reply, ‘ Because I hate questions.’ I am always careful to say, ‘ You are well, I hope ; ’ never, ‘ How are you ? ’ ”

“ I suppose,” Mr. Atwood rejoined, “ that if you have thought at all, you have set us down as old married people. We are not a young couple, at least one of us is not, but our coupling is young enough. We

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have not been married a year, Mrs. Severance. I had meant to ask your permission to bring Mrs. Atwood to call upon you to-day. As it is, I must postpone the pleasure; for I left her in a picture gallery down the street, and must return for her."

Malcolm Severance replied by opening the door of the closet and taking out a fourth plate, which he set on the table.

"That is soon settled," he said. "It's our last plate, though; if any one else comes, he must eat off his hands."

Marie quickly added a glass, knife, fork, and spoon to the plate on the table. She placed a chair before them.

"Madame is served," she said with a wave of her hand, "if she will come; but can she stand these steps of ours?"

"She is not so old as I am, and I stand them often enough," Mr. Atwood answered, smiling.

"You are a man. Seven flights to wind around and around! A perfect corkscrew. Sometimes I think I am one when I reach the top. It is making one of my legs grow longer than the other. I shall be glad when

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it does myself. It will be so much easier to climb up then."

Her husband interrupted her half angrily:—

"How can you say such things, Marie? Your figure is perfect."

Mrs. Severance shrugged her shoulders.

"That is resentment for his model, not his wife. Go, bring Madame, Mr. Atwood. The lamb will be cold. Stay, it shall wait for you in the oven; only hurry."

Mr. Atwood still lingered.

"I accept your invitation for us both," he said; "but be prepared, Mrs. Severance, you will not see what you expect."

"I have lived in seven cities, and lived as many lives as a cat in each. All that in twenty-one years. Mr. Atwood, I expect that which I see."

As Mr. Atwood left the room, Severance turned to his easel. He drew the cover from his picture, and was standing looking down at it when his wife joined him.

"Not curious!" she said. "I have longed to know something about his wife. Malcolm, I have a curiosity which can hardly

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wait seven flights and down the street. Malcolm, you don't hear a word I speak to you."

She picked up a long brush that lay near by with her husband's palette, and struck him with it on the shoulder. He looked up with a start.

"See," she cried, "would you love me better if I were like this — bristles for hair and a stick for a body?"

Severance took the brush from her, laughingly kissing her hand.

"What would then become of my Cigarette Maker?"

He nodded toward a second canvas leaning against the wall. Marie's face changed.

"Malcolm," she said slowly, "listen. Some day I shall startle you. I am your wife, flesh and blood, not your model. Suppose to-morrow I say to you, 'I will pose no more for you.' What then?"

"You would not say it. You are my inspiration, Marie."

"I am your wife. I may say it."

"No; you will not."

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"You know me ; I will not. I am a fool. That is, I am half a fool. Were I all fool, or all knowing, it might be better for us both. I hear them coming, Malcolm. Tell me where I should meet Mrs. Atwood ? In the centre of the room, at the door, half-way down the seven flights, — where ?"

"Here," answered Severance, "as they are here now." He opened the door as he spoke, and Mr. Atwood entered with Aline. Marie came forward quickly.

"I do not need an introduction to Mr. Atwood's wife," she said prettily, taking Aline's hand between both of hers. "If you do not know how glad I am to see you here, let me tell you so. Mrs. Atwood, your husband has promised that you will break bread with us. I will not make you mount to my bedroom." She glanced quizzically at the shelf. "You see we have imported some Paris customs. But seven flights are enough ; let me take your wrappings from you,—and first, let me present my husband."

Aline accepted the introduction, allowed Marie to remove both gloves and wraps,

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and took her place at the table with what was for her an unusual awkwardness. She was conscious of the fact, and annoyed by it. That she was a woman of the world she believed. But this was not her world. Her husband sat in his place as easy as if at his own table

"What is it, Severance?" he asked. "You want me to preside, do you? Of course I will. You have distinguished yourself enough for one day. I speak to be toast-master too. Open the wine, while I carve the lamb. 'Mary, have a little lamb?' Pardon the liberty, Severance."

Mrs. Severance laughed gayly.

"I can quote your nursery rhymes too. 'Mary loves the lamb, you know.'"

"I see you one better," added Severance, wrestling with the corkscrew. "'Everywhere that Mary is the lamb is sure to go.'"

"Perhaps it is that 'she is always kind,'" ventured Aline, glancing at Mrs. Severance. She flushed as she spoke. This was an atmosphere wholly foreign to her, and she felt it. Therefore she made a special ef-

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fort. Mr. Atwood laid down the carving knife and fork.

"Severance," he said, "you need not open that bottle, my friend. This table is too sparkling as it is. I think the Master's visit has intoxicated us all. Here is my ever-sedate wife adding her quatum. You have already filled the glasses? Very well, then. Here's to the future as we see it to-day; to be drunk standing, and every glass meeting over the table."

Aline's glass clicked with the rest. As they sat down again after the toast, Marie leaned toward her across the table.

"I know who is kind," she said gratefully. "I fear we are too exultant for civility to-day, Mrs. Atwood. You are very good to lend yourself to our mood. My father used to say to me that nothing endeared one to others so much as that. He was so kind himself! I remember once when he was very old that he called on an old lady who was sorely distressed because her false teeth were broken, and she was obliged to receive him toothless. What did my father do? He turned his back for a

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moment, and when he faced her again he was toothless also."

"Ah!" said Mr. Atwood, "there was a perfect breeding. But, do you know, false teeth are a triumph of civilisation at which I still wonder. Upon my word, I expect to see the day when we can buy artificial feelings over a counter, so much per pound; who'll buy?"

"Not I," Aline answered; "real feelings are troublesome enough." Severance looked up at her quickly.

"For me that day has come," he said. "What feelings and what lofty ideals I have Marie supplies for me."

Marie interrupted him reproachfully.

"Malcolm, Mrs. Atwood will believe you."

"Then she will believe the truth. Personally, my ideals are distinctly low. I would far rather be a live coward than a dead hero. Mrs. Atwood, I should have given up the struggle and become a sign-painter long ago had Marie let me be. It is she who scourges me on and keeps me whipped up to a proper point."

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"The reaction has set in," said Mr. Atwood. "I have been waiting for it. How long does this mood usually last, Mrs. Severance? Did you confess these mental backslidings and wifely exhortings to the Master, Malcolm?"

Severance began to laugh.

"Did not Marie tell you how the Master inquired into my domestic life?"

Marie was bending over her plate.

"I could not remember everything," she said.

Mr. Atwood glanced at her as she spoke.

"Mrs. Severance told me the whole story," he answered somewhat quickly. "I repeated it to Mrs. Atwood on the way here."

"No, I did not tell you what he refers to," said Marie, looking up again. "Tell it yourself, Malcolm." She drew the salad toward her, cutting out the stalks from the lettuce and larding the shredded leaves with oil.

"It was the most absurd thing. I told Marie the Master must not suspect her existence; that he would never understand

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our living in this fashion. You know he would have thought it simply suicidal, and washed his hands of me in the beginning. As it was, he looked all about him — at the stove, the table, the shelf, the divan. I could see Marie's work-basket where you forgot it on the divan, my dear, and I expected an accusing finger and 'What's that?' each moment. Fortunately he overlooked it, or it conveyed no impression. 'You cook here, I see,' he said. 'Yes.'— 'And sleep up there?'— 'Yes.'— 'You have no chum?'— 'No.' He literally beamed. 'That's right, right. Live for one thing alone. Give your whole self to it. Half a loaf may be better than no bread; half a heart is worse than none at all.' Marie, what are you doing with that vinegar?"

Marie pushed the salad bowl from her.

"Spoiling the salad," she answered. "My hand slipped."

Mr. Atwood stretched out his arm, lifting the bowl and setting it on the table before himself.

"Let me doctor it," he said. "You two children can do nothing to-day. Severance

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couldn't carve, and you mess the salad. Here, give me the salt and pepper. Severance, suppose the Master knew your full cup of iniquity—that you had not only hampered your career with a wife, without whom you would be as much good to the world as a saltless salad, but that in marrying her you had spoiled another artist."

"An artist!" repeated Marie scornfully. "I plumbed my art long ago. In posing, making costumes, suggesting occasionally, my art finds as full expression as it deserves."

"H-e-a-r-t," spelled Mr. Atwood in a low voice to Marie; "add *he* to woman's *art*, and you see what you get."

Marie laughed. "I had plenty of time to choose between the syllables. I kept Malcolm at bay for a long term. He was my lover from his entrance into Paris and the art class, and a very difficult lover he was to hold back."

"I can well believe it," answered Mr. Atwood. "Look at him now, preaching his soul out in sophistries to Aline over an apple seed and she drinking it all in. Mrs. Severance, the longer I live the more I

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realise that what a man says to a woman matters not at all. It's the manner of saying that counts. The most impassioned love letter I ever read was written on a typewriter. I assure you it brought tears to my eyes as I read it, but in spite of all I could do it broke the engagement."

At the other side of the table Aline and Severance were talking together.

"Mr. Severance," Aline had begun, abruptly for her, "will you tell me if you meant it when you said just now that you had no feelings."

Severance turned his reflective eyes upon Aline's face.

"Did you mean it," she continued, "when you said that your ideals were low?"

Still gazing at her, he smiled slightly. "Are your ideals low?" he asked. Aline flushed. "I did not mean to offend you," he went on; "why should they not be?"

He drew out an apple from the bowl of fruit on the table, and twisted it in his hands, ripping it open. Some of the black seeds fell on the tablecloth.

"That was what I wanted to show you.

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Look at this seed. The ideal for which it stands is an apple-tree. If it find proper soil it is one."

He picked up the seed in his fingers, and, biting the kernel from it, flung the husk away. "What is it now? A seed fallen by the wayside. I was not the soil for it. We don't sow the ideals or make ourselves; we are simply born, and with or without feeling, as the case may be. So your ideals are low?"

"Yes," she replied. "As you put it, I was not born to harbour high ideals."

"Then why should you pretend to them? Do you conscientiously live up, or rather down, to those ideals you have?"

"I think I do."

"Contentedly?"

"Comparatively."

"Then you are braver than I. I live up to, or rather reach after, what Marie expects of me, not what I am. My apple-seed grows in an artificial soil largely provided by Marie, and at great labour. I possessed personally about a flower-pot of ambition, where the wretched little seed got

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started one day. Now I have got to grow a tree. I often wish some one had bitten the seed in two, and eaten it as I do this one. Have you never eaten an apple-seed? Pray take one, and remember you are eating concentrated tree."

Aline took the seed he offered.

"The flavour is very delicate," she said, "but you make me feel as if I were committing murder."

"No," he answered; "what we can't grow, let us eat — to-morrow we may die. Do you know, I love every part of an apple. I can munch and munch and dream of the flesh-pots of Egypt. Apples are my flesh-pots. I ought to be farmer of a New England apple orchard to-day, as my father and grandfather were before me. There is nothing like a country life. A glorious self-satisfaction and fat content with all things shut one in deliciously. I dream of dropping back into it. Some day I shall. My earliest recollection is of lying awake to listen for the apples dropping from an old tree that was too decrepit to hold its fruit. I could hear them thud and roll over the

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roof of the porch outside my bedroom window to the ground below. My youth was filled with apples. When I hear the word country I think of apples, orchards of them. From the hills that overlooked our farm I could sit by the hour and gaze down on the lines and lines of trees standing like combs below me, green at one season, white and pink at another, then brown and bare, but always low boughed and with twisting limbs. It was those trees that drove me into being an artist — those trees first, and after that, Paris and Marie."

"Still haranguing, Severance?" said Mr. Atwood. "What is your text?"

Severance turned indolently.

"I was telling Mrs. Atwood that I was born in a briar patch, and bricks and mortar stifle me."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Atwood, laughing; "in an ethical briar patch you were born; but as for bricks and mortar, the dust of the city is the breath of your nostrils, Malcolm. Aline, are you watching the hour? Mrs. Severance will pardon us for doing so. We have an engagement later."

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"We have it now," said Aline, glancing at her watch.

Mr. Atwood rose unceremoniously.

"Then we must hurry away. Where are your wraps and gloves, Aline?"

Mrs. Severance rose also, bringing Aline her wrappings.

"There is a rather nice question between us, Mrs. Severance," said Aline, as she accepted her assistance. "Do I owe you a dinner call, or do you owe me a return of my first visit?"

"We may leave it to whichever one of us passes the other's home first," answered Marie easily, turning to receive Mr. Atwood's farewell words.

Aline was left for the moment with Severance.

"Well!" he said.

He was smiling at her as he spoke. Aline suddenly held out her hand.

"You understand one quickly, Mr. Severance. Perhaps your apple seed meant more to me than you know. Or rather, you watered a seed already well set. I shall be glad to see you in my home."

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As they drove away from the Severances' door, Mr. Atwood turned to his wife. "Well?" he said, and Aline laughed as she looked up.

"You are the second person who has said 'Well' to me in the last five minutes. Do I look so thoughtful?"

"A little, perhaps. What do you think of the Severances' interior?"

"I found it interesting. But how unconventional they are, and you with them! I never saw you so before."

"You have for the first time seen Bohemia at home. They are mild gipsies, however. So you found them interesting?"

"I found Mr. Severance unusual."

"And Mrs. Severance?"

"She seemed more like ourselves."

"In reality she is the gipsy. The history of Severance is written. He will do better work every year, and become wholly civilized."

"He will succeed, then?"

"Inevitably. There is nothing inevitable about Mrs. Severance. She has a strange element of unexpectedness in her."

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I suppose she is the result of an American mother and a French father. I know she lived a roving life, and I fancy a hard one, before her marriage. I am always reminded of a shaddock by her — a taste of sweet and of bitter, with a wild flavour suggested, and a tendency to fly in your face. I do not thoroughly understand her. Severance does perfectly when he takes the trouble, which he did not to-day."

"I should think he might well be capable of understanding a more difficult, a more reserved nature," Aline answered. She looked thoughtfully out of the carriage window into the street.

Her husband smiled as he watched her. "Too well," he answered. "Severance can lose his own personality in that of those he talks with, if he desires it. Aline, did I think you likely to see much of him, I would drop you a word of warning. He has a clever mind, but it is new made each morning, like a feather-bed, and he does not always think before he talks. He wounded his wife to-day by his carelessness."

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"I heard nothing."

"How would you, of all women, like being shelved and repudiated in your own hearing as she was to-day during the Master's visit? Mrs. Severance loves her husband, and she is more or less jealous of the art to which she is sacrificed."

Aline's lip curled.

"He sacrificed much in marrying her. I should think she would be proud of his work."

"She is both, — jealous and proud. You do not understand jealousy, do you, Aline?"

"It disgusts me."

"I could not, then, make you jealous?" Mr. Atwood laid his hand playfully on his wife's arm. She drew away.

"In the open streets!" she remonstrated. "People will say we are sentimental if not jealous."

"And that would equally disgust you, would it not? No, Aline, we could be accused of neither. We are known as a practical, jog-trot couple."

Aline glanced quickly from her husband to the card-case she held in her hand.

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"And you," she questioned, "could you be jealous? You speak of my lack of jealousy, but I also might complain."

"Was I complaining? I think we never have and never will give each other cause for uneasiness. What have you to tell me, Aline?"

"How did you know I had anything to tell?"

"You always grow tentative when you have. What is it?"

Aline hesitated, fingering her card-case, which she half opened.

"Mr. McHenry," she said, "has grown indefinitely impertinent lately."

"I feared so. What have you done?"

"I would have done nothing without consulting you. I have ignored until to-day — and then" —

Again opening the card-case, she drew out a letter, which after a moment's hesitation she gave to Mr. Atwood. As he unfolded and read it, his brow reddened. He folded the letter again, and put it into his own pocket-book.

"Thank you, Aline," he said; "you are

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very wise, my child. You have not yet replied, I suppose."

"Oh, no."

"The impertinence is still veiled enough to ignore. When you reach home, write a note to Mr. McHenry in my name, asking him to luncheon to-morrow and to ride with us afterward."

Aline drew back. "You care no more than that," she said bitterly, "and I was fool enough to be afraid to tell you!"

For the second time Mr. Atwood took his wife's hand in his, despite her resistance.

"Never mind, Aline, no one can see or misinterpret. My child, matters are not quite right between you and me. They have not been so for some time. We must have one of our plain talks, and why not now? The truth is, we are somewhat confused. I am now neither your guardian nor your husband. We have got to find a new basis, or go back to the old one. Dear, there is nothing to cry about. I am not blaming you. Come, there is the curtain pulled down. Now, lean against me, and cry if you want. Why, what is it, Aline?"

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Poor child, you can't tell me ; for you don't know, and I can do nothing to help you. You must not think me careless of my wife. My personal impulse is to brain Mr. McHenry, but you know there are difficulties in the way of braining a fool. To-morrow I had meant that he should ride with me alone. You can stay at home on some excuse. He will not be offensive to you after that ride, and not be quite sure why, either. Isn't that better than letting him see you understand his impertinence? My child, perhaps I should have spoken to you of this before. These impertinences are what you will have to expect for a time ; and, as I said, I can help you very little. You know we have made no pretence at a marriage of sentiment. People cannot divine what a Shylock I should be for every pound of flesh that is mine. To be very bald, you represent to the McHenrys of this world the young wife of a man nearly double your age, and fair game for impertinence until you yourself make your position perfectly clear. You alone can do that. But you can with time to help you."

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Aline lifted her head, drying her eyes.

"Do you mean," she cried indignantly, "that they dare to think?" —

"In plain words, Aline, they think you are not so cold as your marriage would assert."

Aline clenched her hands.

"I am ; such doubts insult me."

"Nevertheless, they doubt, and patience alone can prove to them that you are the ice maiden you and I know you to be. Aline, I should feel you as safe in your own drawing-room, with the most dangerous of men whispering in your ear, as another woman alone on a desert island."

He drew her to him as if in apology. "Does that please you?" he asked in a new tone. "Are you comforted?"

"Yes," she said slowly. Then looking up into his face, she asked a sudden question, which left him for the moment without a reply.

"But why does it displease you?"

"I! Can a man be displeased that he is so sure of his wife?"

As she still gazed at him, he bent to kiss her brow.

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"My child," he said, "you are right. I was lying to you. Some day you may understand, Aline, but not now, my little Undine, not now. See, we are at home. You have just fifteen minutes in which to change your gown. Dry your eyes and hurry."

"Dry your eyes and hurry," repeated Aline to herself.

Her maid had lifted off her bonnet, and was rearranging her mistress's hair. Aline looked into the glass before which she sat.

"Dry your eyes and hurry—yes, that about represents my life."

As she glanced down, she caught sight of a glossy brown seed nestling in a fold of her ribbons. Aline took it out carefully, and looked at it lying in the palm of her hand.

"How quickly he understood," she thought. "If I am born so, who is to blame?"

Rising, she moved toward her secretary, taking with her a piece of jeweller's cotton which lay on her dressing-table. Opening her stamp-box, she laid the cotton in

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one of the compartments, set the seed carefully upon it, and closed the lid. Near the stamp-box lay three tickets of admission to a private collection of paintings, which was to open the following day. The tickets were difficult to obtain. Mr. Atwood had expressed the wish that she should accompany him to the exhibition. After a moment's hesitation, Aline hastily caught up an envelope, thrusting into it the third ticket, with one of her cards. Again opening the little box she stamped her envelope, addressed it to Malcolm Severance, and handed it over to her maid as she finished her hasty toilette.

Later in the day Mr. Atwood, looking hurriedly for a stamp, wandered into his wife's room and to her desk. As he opened her stamp-box, he saw the plump little apple-seed lying there on its cotton nest, and took it up in his fingers curiously at first, then turning it over, he smiled half sadly, half with amusement.

"No good ever yet came of a woman and an apple," he said, half aloud; "still"—he laid the seed back in the box. "Ah,

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well, it can do no harm, and may serve to interest her."

* * * * *

Mrs. Severance lay on her divan, but she was not playing her favorite jewsharp as on the day when Mr. Atwood discovered her there three months before. She was lying with her feet crossed, her hands idle by her sides, and her eyes gazing out of the window. There were other differences too, in these three months. Where the lines of Marie's throat had been gracefully slender, they were now almost attenuated, and her figure had lost some of its pretty curves. The room also was changed. The stove in the corner was gone; through an open door beyond you could see where it had been set in a small apartment, half dining-room, half kitchen. The curtain had also been taken away from the great shelf, and its bedroom furnishings moved to a little closet at the back of the house. All signs pointed to more prosperous days, yet Marie Severance lay on her divan either staring out of the window, or with eyelids wearily closed. When Malcolm's step

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sounded on the stair outside, she raised her head, listening, and looked up smiling as he entered. He came toward her, seating himself on the divan by her side.

"Tired?" he said.

"No," she answered; "only lazy."

Malcolm laid his fingers on her temples, to draw them down her face and throat, following their outlines.

"You are too thin, Marie."

"Am I? It makes no difference. The Cigarette Maker is finished. Paint me as a beggar before I get fat again."

"You are feeling well, dear?"

"Perfectly well. Why shouldn't I be?"

"True, we have plenty to eat and drink now, but you seem to grow thin on it. Perhaps you are doing too much. Suppose in place of having a char-woman in twice a week, we have her here every morning. We can afford it now, thanks to our fairy godmother."

Marie turned from him.

"No, I want no help: I am quite well. Malcolm, you irritate me. Success is thanks to yourself."

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"If Mrs. Atwood had not done all she has, you would have seen the difference."

"If she had not done it, some one else would. You were ripe for it, that's all."

"Well, we won't quarrel as to the bridge. The great point is, here I am. Did you sew the button on my coat, dear?"

"No," she answered. "Bring me the coat and my work-basket, Malcolm. Yes, that's right. Did you expect me to sew on a button which you did not give me? Where is it?"

"Lost: you must evolve one from your inner consciousness, Marie; and if it's not worth a button, it's not worth much."

Marie laughed, turning the coat over on her knee.

"I am not sure that this is worth a button, either."

"Give it away, then: I have another. What are clothes to me now? I'm that reckless!"

Marie stroked down the velvet collar of his coat with the palms of her hands. "Malcolm, do you remember when I renewed this velvet collar for you? We were

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just married. I had only a remnant to use, and had to piece it with a seam in the middle of the back. You had worn the collar in rags, but you hated that seam."

"Of course I did: no man's collar has a seam up the back."

"So you pointed out to me on every neck we walked behind that winter. Malcolm, now that you have done with the coat, I am going to confess to you. After I relined it, there was always a twist on one of the tails which I never could get out, and which wagged in the queerest way when you walked. I used to slip behind you in agonies of laughter."

Her husband laughed with her good-naturedly, tapping her cheek with his finger.

"No more relining now. Those days are past, thank Heaven!"

Marie looked up wistfully.

"Yet they were happy days, Malcolm. We did everything together. Do you remember our papering this room ourselves?"

"I remember your using the mortar as a pincushion until we did, and my being perched on the ladder while you pasted be-

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low, handing me up the stickiest paper. We have had some good times, Marie, but there are better to come."

"I don't know. Sometimes I am so lonely, Malcolm."

"That is the price of a successful husband. What is that on the table?"

"A letter for you."

"Why didn't you tell me? From Mrs. Atwood. Let me see. Another private view. That's well. I wanted that. She is very thoughtful."

"For herself. Do you think she would ask you if she did not desire it?"

Malcolm turned toward his wife.

"Marie, why do you always speak in that tone about Mrs. Atwood?"

"How did I speak? Was the tone low?"

Her husband was laughing as he remonstrated.

"That was a woman's scratch, Marie. Sometimes I think you positively hate Mrs. Atwood."

"I do."

"She is not conscious of offending you."

"She is not conscious that I exist."

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Severance looked up with the quick comprehension peculiar to him, laughing again as he assented :

"You are perfectly right. She is a supremely unconscious being toward everything that does not touch herself. For her it simply does not exist. The attitude lends to her a peculiar charm. She is perfect of a kind. Perfect to the sight, perfectly self-poised, perfectly cold, and each man says in his soul, '*I could rouse her.*' She is as a perpetual and unconscious flattery to him, if you can understand that."

"And you? Do you also think that you could rouse her?"

"I? I accomplish it in a measure. I can at least understand her. We are alike in some ways."

"Malcolm, you are not."

"Yes, we are. You don't know, Marie. Man is a many-sided being, a kind of hexagon; even his wife knows but one or two sides of him."

"Is this meant as explanation of your position toward Mrs. Atwood?"

"How often must I explain that to you?"

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To Mrs. Atwood I represent the first person who has understood and frankly sympathized with her peculiar temperament. I give her what moral, or immoral, support she needs; in turn, to me she represents this." He held up the ticket in his hand. "Admittance to every place I need to go; introductions to all the people I need to know. A fair exchange. That the consequences are good we need only glance about us to see. By the way, dear, how do we stand financially? Bollis repeats his offer for the Cigarette Maker. Can we afford to refuse it?"

"Malcolm, it is but half its value."

"I know; my best work yet, I think. Can we keep it?"

"We must; but I think we easily can." Marie drew a key from her pocket, and, opening the drawer of her work-table, took from it a leather bag, the contents of which she emptied on the cloth. She looked up laughing, flushed with pleasure as Malcolm whistled at the pile of money poured out before him.

"The Cigarette Maker is safe," he said, tossing over the heap. "But if I had been

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in charge of affairs, this would have slipped away like water. You good little saving thing!" He drew his wife to him and kissed her. Marie clung to him, her arms about his neck.

"Do you love me, Malcolm?"

"Love you, child! You were born for me to love. Of course I do."

"Better than any one in the world?"

"In or out."

She turned from him brightly, gathering the money into the bag again, which she locked up as before. Malcolm had moved to the window, and was looking out, his hands in his empty pockets. As Marie approached he wheeled abruptly.

"By the way, Marie, I almost forgot. This is Mrs. Atwood's birthday. I have not a cent in my pockets, and I must send her some flowers. As the greater part of that pile of wealth is due to her introductions, we will return her a certain per cent in blossoms." Marie deliberately passed the key from her hand to her pocket.

"Not with my consent," she said slowly, her face paling. Malcolm stared at her.

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"What do you mean, child? Your consent! Did I ask your consent, or need to?"

The large pupils of Marie's eyes grew larger, her jaw set. With an effort at composure she sat down on the divan and lifted her sewing from the work-basket. She did not look up as Malcolm seated himself beside her.

"Marie, what does this mean? Put that thing down and answer me." He took the work from her hands, not gently.

The long line of his wife's throat swelled. She lifted her eyes hot with anger.

"Is it your habit to send tributes of flowers to Mrs. Atwood?"

"And if it were?"

"I am glad to know what I suspected, that is all. Malcolm, do you think I care for all these comforts? I had far rather live forever as we have lived — together — than suffer this."

"Suffer what? Marie, you are carrying this too far. It amounts to vulgar jealousy. I warn you, we have never yet quarrelled, but we may."

"Why have we not quarrelled? Because

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I have stood everything with only timid remonstrances. This is not vulgar jealousy. So long as you were absorbed in your art as art alone, I bore it. I will not stand its being personified in another woman."

Severance looked into his wife's face with a coldness which froze the words on her lips.

"Your mythology is at fault," he said as he rose. "The god of art is personified in a man. Give me that key, if you please."

Marie sat like a stone. Malcolm held out his hand impatiently. "The key, Marie. Must I remind you that the money is mine to fling in the gutter if I choose."

She held herself rigidly, and his anger rose.

"Marie, do you deliberately refuse me that key?" She still sat with lips tightly shut, her eyes fixed before her.

"For the last time, Marie? As you will, then."

She heard the door open and shut; the sound of his footsteps on the stairs grew fainter. Marie Severance flung herself on her knees by the divan, and, with her face buried in the cushions, screamed aloud.

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“Come back ; you shall have it ” —

She stopped her own mouth. Her fingers were in her ears. She did not hear the footsteps die away. For an hour she lay there, not weeping, only clutching the cushions closer to her breast. When she raised her head, tears could not have changed her face more than it was changed. On the other side of the divan, where Malcolm had sat, she saw in the soft pillow the mark of his arm. Marie rose to seize the pillow, beating the mark out. From one end of the little room to the other she paced back and forth, moaning under her breath, “What have we done !” over and over.

A rap at the door made her start as if at a pistol-shot. A boy entered, bringing a piece of paper, which she tore in opening when she saw the handwriting. The paper was simply a signed order from her husband to deliver the Cigarette Maker to the bearer. Marie drew in her breath.

“Where do you come from ? ” she asked. “From Mr. Bollis,” the boy answered, and Marie grew whiter. She stood motionless, staring at him until he plucked her by the

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sleeve. Marie pointed to the corner where the canvas stood. She watched it wrapped and taken away without a word, then again she flung herself down, and the tears came. She had posed for this picture until her body ached; she had steadied her weary voice to encourage the hand that painted; she had loved and laboured and slaved and toiled, and now, to gratify the vanity of one who neither toiled nor spun, it was gone.

Marie ceased weeping when there were no more tears. As she turned wretchedly on her couch, her hand, falling to the floor, touched the envelope which Aline had that day sent, and which Malcolm had dropped. She shuddered, drawing back from the contact. At that moment came a second knock at the door. She moved to rise, but sank back feebly. When the knock was repeated, in answer to her weak, "Enter," Aline opened the door, panting and rosy with her climb up the stairs, her bosom laden with pink roses. She smiled over them at the other woman on her couch.

"As you never come to see me, I have

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come to you to be congratulated," she said. "This is my birthday, Mrs. Severance." Marie rose slowly to her feet.

"Mrs. Atwood, why have you come here? Do you want me to say that I am glad you were born, when I was lying here cursing that day?"

Aline started back dismayed, her face changing as if the smile had been struck from her lips.

"Mrs. Severance!" she cried incredulously.

Marie went on:—

"Am I the only one who has reason to do that? Let me ask you a few questions. What your history has been I know. Where is the lover you threw aside? What kind of wife are you to the man you have tricked into marrying you? Was not that enough, without wrecking my happiness also?"

Aline shrank yet more. "Are you speaking of me?" she faltered.

"Yes; of you who are teaching my husband to love you. Do you love him?"

"Do I love your husband!"

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Marie laughed contemptuously, "Why do I ask? Love! It would be better if you did. You have not blood enough to care. You are a vampire, feeding on the blood of others. You give nothing, and accept all. Those very roses on your bosom that you flaunt in my face, my husband sent to you. See, you dare to blush over them! You cannot deny it."

Aline drew herself up superbly, her eyes flashing.

"At last I understand you! I should have understood earlier. I do not attempt to deny anything. Believe what you like, whatever your imagination prompts. As for your husband — let him speak for himself."

She turned to the doorway, where Severance stood looking from one woman to the other. Aline swept nearer to him.

"Mr. Severance, I do not know how much you have heard. Your wife has done me the honour to be — jealous of me, and tell me so. Be good enough to let me pass."

Malcolm Severance drew back from the door, holding it open, and allowing Aline to pass out. She waved him back imperi-

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ously as he would have followed her down the stairs. Malcolm returned to his room, shutting the door gently after him.

"Marie," he said, his voice was unusually quiet, "do I understand that you have ventured to insult Mrs. Atwood here?" Marie's passionate, lifted face defied him.

"I have told her what I thought of her. I now tell you what I think of you. Malcolm, to undersell your picture to humiliate me and flatter her vanity, was" —

"Take care, Marie. Once before I warned you; again you are going too far."

"I will finish. It was despicable. When you did that, you went too far. I will share allegiance with no woman. Follow her if you will. Here is the key. Smother her in flowers. You shall choose between us."

"You said all this to Mrs. Atwood?"

"More than that I said to her."

"Marie, you are mad!"

He snatched up his hat as he spoke. Marie stood between him and the door.

"Where are you going?"

"After her, of course. Let me go, Marie; don't touch me. You have ruined us all."

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He brushed her hands from his arm, and was gone, leaving her staggering.

And Aline. It had seemed to her but one rush down the seven flights to her home, and into her husband's study.

Mr. Atwood looked up from the book he was reading, startled at her entrance.

"Aline, what has happened?"

She paused at his chair for a moment to reply incoherently, her face burning: —

"I have been insulted — insulted as no woman ever was before."

Following his wife as she paced the floor, he put his arm about her, checking and steadying her.

"What is it?" he repeated.

"You warned me to expect impertinence, but nothing like this."

Mr. Atwood's brow tightened, his face changed. "You are safe now. Has McHenry" —

Aline interrupted him. "McHenry! no. I wish he had. I could have crushed him. You did not warn me that women would insult me. If I knew a stronger word I would use it. She accused me of wrecking

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her happiness, of — oh, I can't soil my lips by repeating it ! ”

She hid her face.

“Go on, my child ; tell me.”

“Of teaching her husband to love me.”

“Who did this, Aline ? ”

“Mrs. Severance.”

“Marie ! Aline, look up at me and speak.”

“Mrs. Severance said to this face that I taught her husband to love me.”

“Child, are you raving ? ”

“I am not. She was.”

“Answer my questions as quickly as you can. Did Mrs. Severance make any more definite charge ? ”

“None, except that her husband sent me these flowers, which was true, and that I was a vampire.”

Mr. Atwood shook his head impatiently.

“Nothing more ? ”

“No ; what worse could she have said ? ”

“What she thinks, probably. A jealous Frenchwoman, with her mind once poisoned, can think anything. When did you last see her ? ”

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"Not for weeks. She has been invited here over and over, but would never come. She has always disliked me."

"When did you see Severance?"

"You know. Whenever I have seen him you have."

Mr. Atwood stood considering.

"As I think of it, I have been seeing him perpetually. He has been lunching constantly with us, too. Don't think me blaming you, dear, but how has this happened?"

"By your invitation, chiefly."

"Yes, I remember. He has chanced in, or come home with us from somewhere. Has he ever been formally invited without Mrs. Severance?"

"Never."

"You are quite positive?"

"Absolutely. I could not have done that."

"Think well, Aline." He laid his hand on her shoulder as he went on. "Remember, I wholly trust you; but have you shown Severance any attentions whatever that excluded his wife?"

Aline flushed slightly. "I could not call

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it that. I have sent him invitations to what meant aid in his work, that is all."

"To him alone?"

"They were artistic affairs only."

"And many of those, dear?"

"All I could get. Why not? I thought you knew it. You generally got me the cards."

"I don't think I quite realized it. Dear, I fear I begin to understand. Severance is utterly careless, and we have been so a little. Did Mrs. Severance give you any reason to think that Severance knew of her feeling? If so, it is he, not she, who has offended us."

"If he did not know before, he knows now." Mr. Atwood turned quickly.

"You have seen him since?"

"He came in on the disgraceful scene, and I myself explained it to him."

"What did he do?"

"He tried to follow me from the house, but I ordered him back."

"To what, after following you from his wife's side! Aline, why did you not tell me this at once? You don't know Marie

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Severance. If I can only reach there in time ! ”

He left his wife, to hurry out into the hall, where, after a moment of hesitation, Aline followed him. Mr. Atwood had already rung the bell for his carriage, and was hunting for his hat and coat. Aline came nearer to him.

“ You are blaming me,” she said. For the first time in her life she stood before him with her lips quivering, her eyes full of tears, and he did not stop to comfort her. He laid his hands on her shoulders, looking into her face.

“ Child,” he said, “ will you never wake ? Don’t you realize what may be at stake in another home ? This is no time to balance responsibilities. Stay here until I come back. I may need you.”

Aline moved instantly away. She returned to the study, to sit there listening, with no more tears in her eyes, no quiver of her lips. She heard the hall door shut and the carriage wheels roll off, but even then, when there were footsteps in the hall outside, she believed that her husband was

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returning to her, until a servant entered, bringing her a card. Aline took it and read the name. As she did so her face flushed hotly.

"Show Mr. Severance into this room," she said.

When Severance entered, Aline rose to receive him. He paused a moment at the door to watch her standing erect and with lifted head, waiting for him, not coming a step forward or raising her hand.

"An unsheathed sword!" Malcolm said to himself.

He approached her with deference in voice and manner.

"Mrs. Atwood, it is very good of you to see me at all. I feel that I ought to be on my knees before you."

"No," Aline answered resentfully; "your proper place, Mr. Severance, is on your face, unless you can tell me that your wife's attitude toward me was as overwhelming a shock to you to-day as to myself. I saw you to ask you this one question."

Severance paused; it could not have been called hesitation.

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"Suppose," he said quietly, "that I should refuse to answer?"

Aline breathed hard.

"Thank you," she said. "You have been as direct as you have been delicate in replying. Mr. Severance, how did you dare to let this happen? How did you presume to allow such a suspicion of me to dwell in the mind of any one for a moment, you knowing it? The bare thought is an insult to me."

He answered gently, "Mrs. Atwood, I think I can prove to you that nothing of the kind has been intended."

"With this everything becomes intentional. I accepted some roses from you to-day. Now that I know your wife has thought of them as expressing sentiment, they are hateful to me. I loathe the very sight of them."

She unpinned the roses from her bosom and flung them into the open grate. On the table near by stood a vase overflowing with the same flowers. Aline glanced at them, and Severance, walking deliberately to the vase, caught the roses from the

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water. He carried them to the fireplace, thrusting them also into the grate, until the chimney-place was a burning arbour. While the flames devoured the sacrifice, and rose-leaves, with ashes of roses, strewed the hearth, Aline spoke again, more composedly, yet with deeper emotion.

"When I think that you have been the means of soiling by the faintest breath my name and my honour, I have no forgiveness for you. You have made me hear to-day what scorched my ears as that fire might."

"I cannot too deeply regret it, or too repentantly tell you so. But, Mrs. Atwood, pray believe me, the one who so offended you was thinking very little one way or the other of a question of honour. She was thinking only of her husband."

"But it is of my honour only that I am thinking. What do I care for her or her husband?"

Severance looked up quickly from the fire into Aline's face. A kind of amazement overspread his features. Then he laughed.

"Mrs. Atwood, forgive me. For a moment I forgot myself unpardonably. You

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are a lesson to us in that direction. Upon my honour, you are, with no exception, the most consistent being I ever met. I beg that you will not think that I came here to excuse my wife to you. I have only just begun to see how excusable she was."

"Do you mean me to understand that you came here to defend her?"

"I mean that her name does not belong in any discussion between us."

"To this extent it does. I have the right, and I do demand that you say to your wife" —

"Pardon me, Mrs. Atwood, you are not quite ignorant of married life; you must know that between man and wife no mortal being can dictate a whisper. If you care to know what I mean to say to her, I will tell you that I am now going to ask pardon of her on my knees. But first let me say this to you for myself. Never, in my remotest thoughts, have I held you as anything but perfectly kind, perfectly cold, perfectly unapproachable. I should no more have dreamed of drawing nearer to

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you than would any other frail craft towards an iceberg."

Aline bowed her head proudly.

"This, Mr. Severance, is just what I wished you to say to your wife when you stopped my speaking."

"Did you wish me to say it for her sake, or for yours? You need not answer me, Mrs. Atwood. I thought I knew you. You had depths my plumb-line did not reach, and so you have been good enough to show them to me. This, I suppose, is farewell?"

Malcolm walked out of the Atwood house toward his own home. He shrugged his shoulders as he turned his back.

"So much," he said to himself, "for swimming with brass pots. Yet I am not sure as to which of us broke the other. Now for Marie!"

In his heart he a little dreaded that meeting; but as he went on a strange desire grew within him to see her. The squares had never seemed so long nor the seven flights so high. When he opened his door it was with a comforting realisation that it led into his home.

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"Marie!" he called gently as he entered, but there was no answer, and, though he could not tell why, the room seemed to him in confusion. Marie was almost too neat, as he often told her. He went back into the bedroom and to the little kitchen, to find only the same confusion, the same conspicuous absence. Marie was gone.

"To buy supper;" he said to himself. "Yes, for supper," but he did not believe it. He was wandering through the rooms, and, though he did not confess it, was everywhere looking for something which he found on his easel, — a letter from Marie, addressed to himself. For a moment he could not open it, then was not able to break the seal as fast as he would. Something hard fell into his hand. It was the wretched key. Malcolm flung it from him. He dragged out of the envelope a bit of writing, only two lines; —

"You have chosen, and left me no choice but this. O dearest, did I not love" — The rest was a blur.

To Malcolm Severance it seemed that the heart in his body ceased to beat; his

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head swam, his knees were water as he read. He knew his wife, and, not as a woman of idle threats. In that moment the past reproached and the future darkened, until the room circled about him, and he fell on the divan where Marie had lain taking her hour of agony alone, the paper crushed in his hand.

The words upon the paper had been written by Marie's fingers not five minutes after Malcolm brushed them from his arm. When he left her staggering from his rude repulse, her resolution was taken while his footsteps were yet on the stair. She had to cling to the table for support with one hand, but with the other she was fitting the key into the lock of the drawer. Her small purse, containing only what was justly hers, lay there. Beside it lay the leather bag of money, and in another corner a box of dried orange blossoms, still fragrant, a pair of white gloves, a white favour, and — Marie caught up the little purse quickly, shutting and locking the drawer. She sat down by the table to enclose the key in an envelope, which she addressed to her husband. Then

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for a moment she hesitated, her pen poised over the paper she drew toward her. The first line was written deliberately, each word weighed ; the next was begun before she knew, and when the knowledge came she flung the pen aside, yet would not begin again. Blotting the words as they were, she enclosed them with the key. This done, she walked steadily through the room, picking up here and there some little personal possessions, which she carried to her bedroom. When she returned once more to the studio, she was dressed for the street and had with her a satchel. As she crossed the floor of the studio, Marie did not lift her eyes. They should take no last look. She would gladly have given her hearing to miss the sound of the closing door. It seemed to shut on her heart. There was no reason in the world why she, Marie Severance, should not walk down the stairs with a satchel in her hand, yet she crept softly, like a criminal. She had come down six flights, meeting no one. There was but one more to descend ; at that last landing she looked up to see Mr. Atwood standing at

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the head of the stair, one hand on the railing, the other against the wall. His swift glance swept her from head to foot, noting each detail, then fastened gravely upon her face.

"Where are you going, Mrs. Severance?" he asked.

Marie recovered herself, and tried to reply lightly, attempting too late to hold her gown between him and the satchel.

"Not to confession to-day, Mr. Atwood."

His face grew more serious. "To-morrow, then? Why not tell me now what all your world will know by that time? Mrs. Severance, I know you are taking a grave step, and you are taking it on a supposition absolutely mistaken."

Marie dropped her gown. "Mr. Atwood, let me pass," she said, facing him.

"One moment only, Mrs. Severance. Will you believe my solemn assurance" —

"No; who has solemnly assured you? She denied nothing to me. Let me pass; you have no right to detain me."

"I do not mean to do so; but where are you going?"

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"Away from here."

"You have already made your arrangements?"

"I can when you let me pass."

"Do you know where you are going?"

"I neither know nor care."

"Then let me do both. You do not realise how late and how dark it is. You will not find respectable houses ready to take in a woman who comes as unprotectedly as you intend to apply. My carriage is at the door. I will drive to a place I know of, and establish you there. By the morning you will have had time to think and make your plans. I tell you frankly, on any other condition I dare not let you out of my sight."

He saw her hesitate, and pressed her.

"You can surely trust me, your oldest friend here, so far."

She looked at him pitifully.

"Oh, yes, for yourself; but can I trust you not to tell my—my husband where I am?"

"I will not tell him."

"Not even that you met me?"

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"Not even that I met you."

"Then I will go with you. Only take me now. He may come at any moment."

Once in the carriage, Mr. Atwood did not speak to her ; they drove on in silence. He had given instructions to the coachman before they set out, and the carriage stopped at last in the middle of a block of houses. Mr. Atwood stepped out quickly, pausing a moment at the curb to speak to Marie.

"I had better make the arrangements for you," he said ; "it may take a little time. Will you wait for me here ?"

"Yes," she answered.

He closed the door, hurrying away, but not to any of the houses in the block. Turning back of the carriage, he walked rapidly to the street corner, down another avenue, and with the same quick pace to the square where his own house stood.

Aline was sitting in her room alone when he entered, seeking her. She neither rose nor turned at his step. Mr. Atwood came behind her chair. Resting his hand on its back, he bent over his wife.

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"Aline," he said gently, "I want you to prepare yourself for something very difficult, but equally imperative, which I have for you to do. My child, I found matters worse than I had feared at the Severances' home. I have come for you as the only being who can set them straight. I want you to go to Mrs. Severance with me at once."

Aline turned to him, her hands grasping the arm of her chair.

"You want me to go to Mrs. Severance! I never shall speak to either of them again! Her husband has been here since you left."

"Severance! What was he here for?"

"To call me an iceberg, apparently. Vampire and iceberg! I don't think I feel called upon to trouble myself with the Severance family."

"I am afraid you will have to see Mrs. Severance, Aline. She tells me you denied nothing to her to-day."

"I did not; why should I condescend to denial? I had nothing to deny. Are you too coming to accuse me?" her voice faltered.

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Mr. Atwood walked over to the writing-table, and opened Aline's stamp-box.

"Is this here still?" he said. "Yes, it is."

He took from its white cotton nest the little withered seed. Aline, watching him, flushed and bit her lip.

"You cannot think I kept that for the sake of Mr. Severance!" she cried.

"No," he answered; "I don't know just why you kept it, but I do know that your actual wrong-doing in this matter is only about as large as this foolish little thing, and that your feeling for Severance himself never amounted to that size."

He flicked the seed away as he spoke. "You found him peculiarly acceptable to you for one reason or another, and so have reached out your hand and taken him, thoughtless of anything but your own pleasure. I have allowed it because — well, because I have always been blind with you in question. The fruit has been inadequately large. I realise all that, but the seed is of your sowing. We have done wrong, and we must undo it. Aline, you will be shocked to learn what I have to tell you. I found

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Mrs. Severance on her way from her husband's home. I have induced her to trust herself to me. She is in my carriage now, waiting out in the street. She thinks I am looking for a refuge for her. I am looking for you as the one being who can induce her to return to her home."

Aline with difficulty controlled her voice. Her eyes filled with tears.

"And you, my own husband, take part against me; you ask me to abase myself to a woman who has said to me what she has said — who has been the cause of your speaking to me as I did not know you could speak," she ended brokenly.

"My wife, I am not taking part against you. If I could do this for you, you know I would, but you alone can act here, and it must be quickly done. My plan is to put you in the carriage with Mrs. Severance. I will sit on the box myself. I cannot tell you what to say to her. You will know how to act. I will drive slowly toward the Severances' house, and when you wish me to stop there, ring the bell. My child, I know this is hard for you, but it cannot be avoided."

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Aline drew herself back in her chair. Her voice was hard and steady.

"You need not be sorry for me; I am not going."

"Then you do not yet realise what it means if Severance comes home to find his wife gone. She must be there when he returns."

"Some one else can take her. I shall not. She has brought all this on herself. I have done nothing, absolutely nothing, that I regret or will condescend to explain."

As Mr. Atwood looked down into his wife's flushed face, his own grew deeply troubled. He glanced up at the clock.

"Aline, what can I say to you? There is so little time." He hesitated for a moment, then spoke quickly. "Look at this from all sides. If it once becomes an open scandal, you will be pointed out, however unjustly, as the woman who broke up that home."

Aline started to her feet.

"Oh, this humiliates me beyond any bearing. I, who have never stepped an inch aside, to have this come to me!"

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She sank back in her chair again, hiding her face. Suddenly her hands fell. She lifted her head.

"Why should I feel it so? I have done nothing. No, and I will do nothing now. Let her go, if she will, and where she will. As for me, they can say what they like; my name will sustain it."

"Aline, consider a moment. Think what you say. You do not mean that."

"I have thought."

"You mean me to understand that as you are safe, you will not lift your finger to save the woman you have wronged, however unthinkingly?"

"I do mean that."

She did not know the deliberate voice in which he answered her.

"You are perfectly right in saying that no one could accuse you of imprudence. I used a subterfuge to touch your selfish fears. I am ashamed that I have resorted to such an appeal, even in extremity. Once you wondered why I was not too glad to be so sure of your coldness. Now perhaps you can see. Your pet sin allows no room

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for other sins. Like Aaron's serpent, it destroys all the rest. I do not ask you now to come with me for your sake; you know perfectly well that you will not suffer to any extent. I do not ask you to come for the sake of that poor woman waiting out there in the street. I command you to come with me simply because I desire it. If you have not a woman's heart in your body, you have a woman's wit in your brain. Use it. Mrs. Severance is to be taken back to her home by you, if we have to drive about this city all night to accomplish it. Understand that this is absolute. Get your hood and cloak. There is no time to lose."

Aline sat motionless, her breath suspended, her eyes wide, and fixed on her husband's face. His eyes softened as he looked at her.

"Aline," he cried, holding out his hands, "can your body only be so lovely? Come with me, dear, of yourself."

Her lip trembled with a sob, but she did not move. Mr. Atwood's hands fell. He turned away, walking to a door at the end

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of the room, which he opened. Aline's maid sat outside sewing.

"Mrs. Atwood's cloak and hood," Mr. Atwood said to her shortly. He glanced back at Aline, then spoke in his usual tones.

"You have slippers on. You will have some distance to walk. Bring me the carriage shoes also. I will take them myself."

He took the wrappings the maid handed in to him, and closed the door. Aline sat like a statue. Her husband knelt before her, and drew on her shoes.

"Come," he said, standing to hold the cloak for her.

Aline lifted her eyes with one quick glance into his face.

"Come, Aline," he repeated, and she rose, trembling from head to foot. Mr. Atwood wrapped the cloak about her. As he did so, for one moment he held her in his arms.

"Child," he said, "why will you make me so harsh to you? Must you be broken in pieces to find your heart?"

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He led her to the door. Aline followed him down the stairs, still speechless. Once she paused, as if to regain her breath, but, as he turned back toward her, she went on again, following him silently as before. They went out into the street, and to the square, where the carriage waited. Just before they reached its door Mr. Atwood paused to look down into his wife's face by the light from a street lamp standing above them. As they left the house he had drawn her passive hand through his arm, now he laid his hand gently over hers.

"Remember," he said, "I shall be close by you in thought. Does your courage fail, Aline?"

Her voice was as wretched as her face.

"It was not lack of courage that kept me away. You know it is my fear only that brings me here."

"Of what are you afraid?"

"Of you. You cannot realise what things you have said to me if you ask that."

Her voice broke. Mr. Atwood bent toward her quickly, then drew back.

"Yes," he answered quietly, "I do real-

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ise all that I said. I meant it all then and now."

Aline drew a shivering breath.

"What can help me then! Why was there not some one to save me? You seemed to care for me. Why did you let me marry you?"

Mr. Atwood laid his other hand on his wife's shoulder, turning her face to him.

"You regret your marriage with me, Aline?"

She looked up desperately without reply.

"Answer me truly," he said solemnly.

"It is too late to go back now."

"I regret it bitterly — bitterly!" she broke out, "if you will know. Now, what can you do?"

"I can thank God," he answered gravely.

"Aline, we must speak of this later. There are others to think of now. Let us do what we can for them first, and afterward what we can for ourselves."

He moved to the carriage door, and opened it. As Mrs. Severance bent forward with an anxious question on her lips, he replied only by lifting Aline to the seat

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beside her, and closing the door on the two women. The next moment the carriage was in motion. Marie sat upright in her place, too amazed to speak; but, as the first flash of light from the street showed her the face of her companion, making one spring for the carriage door, she would have flung herself into the street, had not Aline caught her strongly by both wrists.

“Mrs. Severance,” she said coldly, “you will kill yourself. My husband tells me that you have left your home through my fault, and he wishes me to explain to you what I refused to enter into this afternoon. Your husband has never seen me except in my husband’s presence or that of others. There has not been a thought harboured, or a word spoken that you could have objected to. I feel that these details are as unnecessary as they are humiliating. Do you wish further vindication of my honour, or does this satisfy you?”

Marie turned on her furiously.

“Why should this satisfy me? Why should I believe you? Would you accept the testimony of one of those poor souls out

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there in the street whom we scarcely name sisters? To me such women as you are worse than they. What honour you possessed you sold with your disgraceful marriage."

Aline's grasp on Marie's arm loosened; she drew back.

"This is the second time to-day, Mrs. Severance, that you have alluded to my marriage in this manner. I am obliged to speak to you of your affairs, but not to submit to this."

"So there is something that touches you! I know nothing about your marriage except what all the world knows,—that you sold yourself for a stated sum, like any other bought girl. I would rather be some poor homeless soul throwing herself away for love than do what you have done. If you had known what a home was, you would have held mine sacred, you would have respected my marriage, where the smallest wedge of division is like the agony of tearing flesh from flesh. What do you know of wifehood, of a husband?"—

Aline was drawing deep breaths. She broke in passionately:—

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"Stop, Mrs. Severance! I will not permit discussion of my marriage and my husband any more than your husband permitted my speaking of his marriage and his wife."

Marie started.

"Malcolm did that? But it was you he followed."

Aline hesitated. "Mrs. Severance," she said, "understand that in speaking further to you I am but my husband's mouthpiece. Your husband followed me apparently to say that his opinion of me was but little less contemptible than your own. Perhaps this will satisfy you. He left me to seek you and ask your pardon."

"To ask my pardon! No, this is but another trick. Even Mr. Atwood has deceived me to-night. I can trust no one."

"He went to ask your pardon on his knees, he said. I can only tell you these things, Mrs. Severance. I cannot make you believe me. My husband was very anxious that Mr. Severance should not find you gone when he reached home. If you consent to return at once, we may reach there before him."

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Marie wrung her hands.

"He has gone to ask my pardon, and will only find my letter! What will he do? Mrs. Atwood, let me get out. Let me go to him. How could I dare to leave my home?"

Aline leaned forward and touched the carriage bell.

"He may not be there yet," she said with cold reassurance. "We may reach the house before him, as we are driving. We shall be moving rapidly now; for that bell was the signal to take you home."

Marie heard the words, not the tone. She grasped Aline's hands gratefully in hers.

"How kind you are to me! I have been unjust to you. Perhaps I have misunderstood everything. I have been crazy, I think. Have I said terrible things to you? I can't remember what I have said."

Aline drew her hands away.

"It is not necessary that both of us should remember, Mrs. Severance. This is your house, I think. Yes, here is my husband at the carriage door."

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Marie almost fell from the carriage into Mr. Atwood's arms. She clung to him appealingly.

"Has he come?"

"I don't know, my child," he answered. "Do you take her up the stairs, Aline."

The two women wound up the stairs together, Marie pausing continually and clinging to the railing as she listened for any sound. When she reached her door she stretched out her hand towards the lock, then drew back.

"I cannot!" she whispered piteously.

Aline laid her hand firmly on the lock, and opened the door. Marie gave one glance into the room and at the divan where Malcolm lay. Her letter had just fallen from his hand to the floor; he was feeling for it without raising his head.

Marie darted across the room, sweeping the paper away as she dropped on her knees at his side.

"Malcolm!" she cried.

From the threshold of the room Aline saw him lift his face. She saw its white

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wretchedness break into a flushed ecstasy as he opened his arms; and turning away, she closed the door behind her. At the foot of the stairs Mr. Atwood was waiting for her.

“Well?” he asked anxiously.

His wife answered him gravely:—

“I left them together.”

“Really together, Aline?”

“Yes; you may be satisfied.”

He glanced at her and said no more, even when they sat alone in the carriage. Aline leaned back in its depths. He felt rather than saw that her face was buried in her hands. It was she who led the way to his study when they returned to their home, and when Mr. Atwood followed her, she was standing by the fireplace where the roses had been destroyed looking down at the bits of charred stalks and rose-leaves that still strewed the hearth. Mr. Atwood braced himself to approach her.

“Aline,” he said gently, “of what are you thinking?”

She looked up to reply slowly:—

“I was thinking that twenty-two is very

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young to die. The epitaph would say, 'Cut down in the flower of her youth.' I had rather have that written over me than stand as I do now, a bare stalk, bud and flowers gone at twenty-two." She went on bitterly, "What have I to look forward to? Mrs. Severance called me worse than homeless. She was right. I am worse than that. Were I really without a roof over my head, some one might take me in, and, in pity, care for me. As it is, I must live on here with no one in the world caring for me. I cannot even remember my father or mother. You were the only being who was anything on earth to me, until you became my husband, who does not love me."

Mr. Atwood replied gravely, "You did not finish. You must add, 'and whom I do not love.'"

"I did love you."

"As your guardian, yes; as your husband, no. My position toward you has grown more nebulous daily since our marriage."

"Why did you ever change it? We were happy together as ward and guardian."

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"Why did I change it? Look back a moment and see. Did you find McHenry delicate when he saw you the wife of a man he knew you did not love? As his wife, when he found you did not love him, but what was his,—and he would have discovered it,—how would you have fared in his hands?"

Aline turned away. "Yes, I remember. You married me to save me from him. I alone am to blame that my life is over at twenty-two. It is suicide, not murder; but that does not make it easier."

Mr. Atwood drew nearer to her.

"Aline," he said, "why is to-day different from a year ago?"

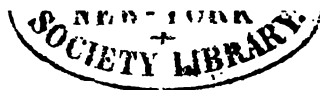
He paused, but she made no answer, and he lifted his hand to lay it on her shoulder. "Then you told me that you had no heart. Have you found that you were mistaken?"

She shrank from both words and touch.

"No, I was not mistaken. I know myself."

"Then, why do you suffer?"

She looked up at him quickly, catching her breath. Her hands covered her face.



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"It is not that," she sobbed; "I am wretched, but it is not that."

Mr. Atwood's hand dropped from her shoulder to her side.

"What is it that I feel throbbing here?" he said softly. "Aline, do you know what you and I have to face to-night? An outraged womanhood has waked and is wringing your heart. She is demanding of us her birthright, that we have sold for a mess of pottage."

Aline shuddered in his arms as he wrapped them about her. She hid her face in his breast with a motion of terror. Her husband laid his hand softly on her hair, drawing her nearer.

"What is it, dear?" he asked; "what frightens you? You are not afraid of me now?"

She clung close to him.

"No; you are my guardian again."

"Am I, Aline? Are you so sure that you know me? Did you know this woman I hold in my arms to-night? Dear, listen to me for a moment. Can you fancy me a stranger, neither the husband nor the guardian,

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you have thought you knew so well, yet holding you thus in my arms, resting here on my heart, my face against your face, my lips close to your ear, whispering, 'Why do you live this life? Is your husband loving? Is your home a home? Let me take you away. I love you as a woman needs to be loved. I love you as a man loves the one woman he wants for his wife. Can you send me from you to keep up the wretched farce you are living? Come away with me now, this hour, and learn what life and loving are.' "

Aline struggled from his arms.

"What are you saying?" she cried helplessly. "What do you mean?"

He caught her two hands, drawing her back.

"Answer me now," he said, "weighing nothing except that you are my wife, and that another man has said this to you. Do these words tempt you? They offer nothing but love. Answer them to me if you can."

She looked up at him, trembling.

"I can answer. I am tempted. I could say yes and go gladly, but I would say no. Why have you taught me this? Why have

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you showed me what I might never have learned?"

She turned away again, and he let her leave him.

"Yet you have told me a thousand times that you were too cold to listen to any man's love. Aline, what tempted you in those words?"

She shook her head.

"I could not tell you, except that they tempted. I want that love, I suppose, even if I have no heart. Why do you make me say these things too late?"

"You have already said more than that. You have told me to-night that you bitterly regretted our marriage."

"That, too, you forced from me. I could have kept it secret. Because I have ruined my life, need yours be wrecked?"

He had drawn nearer to her, and before she ended had taken her again into his arms. He spoke rapidly, with emotion:—

"Child, you flung me the first plank to cling to! Aline, look into my face. Why are you so sure that you know me? Look up, dear; look at me. Am I to you what

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your husband should be? God knows I have tried to be, but I am not. Long before the law released me I was not your guardian in feeling. What am I toward you, dear? Who is it that is holding you in his arms, resting here on his heart, his face against your face, telling you that he loves you as a woman needs to be loved, as he loves the one woman he wants for his wife?"

Aline lifted her head, gazing with passionate reproach into her husband's face.

"Stop!" she cried; "how can you? You are cruel to mock me."

He laid his hand tenderly over her eyes, then stooped to kiss the closed lids.

"Be opened!" he said; "my beloved, it is your lover who wakes you. I have loved you with a man's love since the day you were old enough to take my heart from me. I had loved you for years when I married you. Look up again, dear, and believe me."

Aline looked up. Her eyes met his. "You loved me like this!" she cried. Her face was quivering. "You loved me then?"

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Oh, why did you marry me? Why did you not wait to woo and win me as other women are won?"

"Dear, was this woman here for me to woo? Aline, you have not been as a wife to me. I have not been as your husband. Did I ever deceive you? You shall be wooed as no woman ever was wooed before. Let us leave this man who has been worse than no husband, and the woman who was less than a wife, here in this house that has been no home, while you and I run away together, — your lover with the woman he loves. Can you send from you this man who holds you in his arms to keep up the wretched farce we were living? Come away with me this very night, away from this place and these people for a time, to learn what life and loving are. Love, how you tremble! Am I taking my hour-born woman too far and too fast?"

She raised her face bathed in tears, and held out her hands to him blindly. Mr. Atwood grasped them both strongly in one of his; his arm still about her, he led her to the door.

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“Aline,” he said, as he laid his hand on the lock, “you must yourself decide. Will you go or stay? I do not urge you. Remember, it is from the tried into the uncertain. I have turned the hasp; the door will stay closed forever, or open at a touch of your hand, if you wish it to open.”

With a swift motion Aline stretched out her hand.

They passed from the room together, closing the door behind them.

LINK V.

MR. ATWOOD'S WIFE.

*The clasped
links.*

LINK V.

MR. ATWOOD'S WIFE.

THE Superintendent made his way to the top of the hall, and turned on both gas-jets, until the light flared up to its highest power.

"Now, you hear me, boys," he said, standing with his hand still on the burner, and looking down the room, "I ain't no millionaire, and gas costs. You don't need to see for sleeping. Here I find you've been burning these lights on full all night. The bill came in as long as a list of your sins. I won't stand it. I'll have the meter taken out of the building first. Then you will be having to spread up your beds and make your twilets in the dark."

His audience replied by a general movement and a murmur, part growl, part speech, like nothing human.

Their beds ! their toilets !

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"I can't offer you more than the soft side of a pine board and the next man's leg for a pillow. That you can have for the asking, but no more," the Superintendent went on.

He spoke to those who had asked and received. As if a rush of undertow from the city outside had swept into the hall, casting on its floor the dregs of life, a waste of humanity stretched from wall to wall at the Superintendent's feet. That the hall had other uses was proven by the benches heaped upon a platform at the head of the room. Where these benches had stood, that which was created to be the highest form of life, lay huddled together, ragged, repulsive, unclean within and without. Yet in a common degradation, a certain individuality asserted itself. The more enterprising had secured the choice places, and lay in a circle about the walls on carefully spread newspapers, which lifted them that shaving above those wallowing contentedly on the bare boards. The sleepy heads that were reared to listen as the Superintendent spoke, bore each its own

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particular expression of fallen manhood. Of the many who slept heavily through all, the Superintendent noted one figure lying in a motionless half-circle about his feet. The prostrate body was curved as a wearied animal's dropping into unconsciousness where it chanced to fall. The relaxed muscles which in a child would have betokened natural sleep told of unnatural slumber in the man. His arm, stretched out straight above his head, pillowed his white face. The gaslight, shining full on his closed lids, seemed to distress him; for his lips moved, and he turned so restlessly that his head dropped on the Superintendent's boot. Stooping, the Superintendent slipped his hand under the mass of light hair, lifting the white face back to the arm from which it fell. As he did so the cleanliness of both hair and flesh struck him. He looked more closely into the exposed features: what he saw made him draw in his lower lip, shaking his head protestingly. When he rose and glanced once more over the hall, before shutting off the light, its aspect seemed to strike him anew.

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“Good God !” he muttered, “and folks thank thee when a man-child is born into this world !”

A tiny star of blue flame from a gas-jet near the door alone burned through the long winter night. It shone more and more blue as the morning light came cold and shivering through the dusty panes into the room, and was fairly extinguished by the first ray of sunshine.

As the uncurtained windows lit up one by one, so one by one the occupants of the hall rose to follow their various habits of life. Those who had chosen to make their coats into pillows, made their pillows into coats. With surprising deftness, born of long practice, they combed their hair with their fingers, pulled on their hats, and departed. The neater element on the newspaper beds, to whom water meant more than a poor apology for stronger drink, sought the lavatory opened for their use, then went their way also.

The Superintendent, standing at the hall door, watched the dispersing crowd until the place was empty save for one figure,

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lying in the same exhausted half-circle which had curled about his feet the night before. He crossed the room, and laid his hand on the man's shoulder.

"Come," he said, "it's time for you to go to work if you have any, and to look for it if you haven't."

He shook the shoulder in his hand as he spoke. The man's head rolled to the floor heavily, yet he did not rouse. His breathing was slow and regular. The upturned face showed whiter in the daylight than when the gaslight had touched it. The Superintendent, bending again to examine him closely, saw that the soil on his clothing was fresh, not ground in as a part of the cloth, which seemed, as did the wearer, of another quality than what ordinarily found its way to this floor.

"Pshaw, pshaw, pshaw!" muttered the Superintendent, not impatiently, but as one to whom the worst side of the day's work presents itself first. He pressed his thumb against the under lid of the man's eye, thrusting the upper lid back, until the dark pupil was exposed to his

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sight. Then raising his head, he called loudly :—

“ You Joseph, come up here ! ”

The man who responded to his call, hurrying through the hall door, was in full accord with his surroundings. His gait was a shuffle, his parchment skin appeared too tight for the bones it covered, and the hair on his head and upper lip had the appearance of being artificially introduced there. His weak and restless eyes settled with disproportionate anxiety on the Superintendent's face. By his side trotted a large cat, belled and beribboned. An immaculate fur and imperious bearing were witness to his physical condition. He was the only high liver on the premises. As his eye fell on the animal, the Superintendent broke into a laugh of pleasure. The sound ended in a queer little crow, as contagious as the laugh of a child. He caught the cat in his arms, rubbing his face against its cold nose as he talked.

“ Ain't you 'shamed o' yourself ? Ain't you 'shamed, Waif ? Out all night like this. You keep on with these ways, and

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your grandpa's goin' to whack you some day. I got a good mind to make you sleep in here with the boys to-night. You want to do that? No siree! Want to sleep with me, do you? Yes, sir. Then you got to behave yourself. I'll have you lying here like this fellow some morning, if you don't brace up. What do you think of him, Joseph?"

Joseph bent timidly over the corpse-like body.

"He looks for all the world like my poor brother the mornin' after he died o' consumption," Joseph ventured.

The Superintendent laughed crowingly again as he set the cat down.

"Consumption!" he retorted; "consumption o' liquor is what he's got. Here, Joseph, you heft his feet, and I'll take his head. Waif, you can follow with the pieces."

Joseph gathered the heavy feet into his hands. The boots which covered them had been patent leather. They were now cracked and rubbed.

"It's bitter cold," Joseph remonstrated.

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"You'll kill him sure, if you put him out in the street."

The Superintendent lifted the man's body easily in his strong arms, settling the rolling head against his breast.

"Move on," he answered; "I'll put him where he belongs. It's a Lord's mercy the mothers that bear men haven't no foresight, nor hindsight neither. Come along!"

The two men passed out from the door, carrying between them their living burden, beneath which the cat walked with the severe dignity of a trained coach dog.

It was late in the day when the sleeper woke, and then he aroused from dreaming to full consciousness in terror. The bed where he lay was strange to him; the room, with its cracked walls and grimy ceiling was strange also. Strangest of all, were the searching eyes into which his opened. They impelled a truthful reply to the question which a voice asked him:—

"What's your name?"

"Archibald Bracken," he answered; and, at the sound of his own words, woke wholly. He saw that he was lying on a rough bed

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in a rough room, where stood three or four more beds of a like kind. The only accompanying furniture was a table with several pitchers and basins upon it. A cheap mirror hung against the wall above them. By the bedstead stood a middle-aged man of low stature but strong build. A great cat lay half on his shoulder, half in his arm, and he kept stroking it with his hand.

"Do you know where I am?" Archibald Bracken asked of him.

"Do I know where you are!" repeated the man by the bed with a crowing laugh. His wide-open blue eyes twinkled. "Well, yes, as you're on my bed."

"Where was I last night?"

"Can't you remember?"

Bracken closed his eyelids suddenly, with the spasm of a reviving memory.

"Yes," he replied slowly; "I was in hell."

"No, you weren't, young man," came the cheery answer, "but you soon will be on these lines. You were in my Rescue Room, that's where you were, and glad to get there, I reckon. You don't want to be

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calling it names to the Superintendent next day." The speaker threw his head back slightly when talking, as if to show the quizzical smile lurking under his grey moustache.

Bracken closed his eyes again wearily, without reply.

"You feel kinder faint? How would a mug of strong coffee seem? Come along, Waif! We'll get it for him, won't we, old man? When you've lost your cat for all night, you're kinder foolish about him the whole day afterward. I'll be back in a minute."

The Superintendent was still holding the cat in his arm when he returned carrying in his free hand a mug of steaming coffee.

Its odour filled the nostrils of the weakened man gratefully. He opened his eyes and took the mug, drinking its contents eagerly. As he raised his arm, the older man laid his fingers on the soiled sleeve which covered it, eying the texture of the cloth.

"How many suits have you wore out on the road?"

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Archibald Bracken looked up enquiringly.

"I mean, how many suits have you wore out tramping? Is this your first?"

"Yes."

"Was it given to you?"

"No."

"I thought not. You haven't wore out the face your mother gave you yet, either. Joseph, now, had wore out two or three faces on the road, and rinds and rinds o' clothes before I got hold of him. That's why he ain't fit to do much more than make coffee now. He makes that good, though, don't he? I caught him one night when I was out fishing in another man's meeting. But I can't ever trust him out of eyeshot — no more than I can Waif, here."

His voice rose to the oddest squeal as he turned again to his cat. "Hi, yah, you Waif! Ain't you 'shamed, sir! — went on a hoodle last night, did you? Comin' in here this morning half froze, and telling me a tale 'bout a *sick friend*. I know you. You're jest one of the boys, you are. Expect to sleep in my bed to-night, too.

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That's the trick! Want to run away and bum it, and come back and find the old place waiting for you. I ought to put you right into Congress Hall with the boys, I ought. What part of the world do you come from?"

He turned suddenly from the cat to the man.

Bracken looked up into the face of his questioner. His lips seemed as if deliberately sealing, and his grasp on the mug relaxed. The Superintendent waved his hand easily.

"It don't matter. We have representatives from ev'ry State and Territory in the Union a-settin' in session here ev'ry night. That's why I call it Congress Hall. You can stay where you're lying now till night, then you must go back with your brother senators. These beds are for me and my converts. When you get through with that mug, set it down. I've got some work to do now. There's a lady up town that gives me her husband's old clothes regular for my boys, and the good Lord made him take on some flesh lately, so she says she's

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just packed up ev'ry blessed thing he had, and sent it to me — that whole trunkful. I'm sortin' 'em out now."

He pointed to the centre of the room, where stood an open trunk, part of its contents still unpacked, part strewn about on the bare boards of the floor.

Bracken lay on the bed listening dully to the Superintendent's dropping talk, addressed half to himself, half to the cat, as he worked over the clothing.

It was not difficult to see that the hands which had packed the trunk with gifts for the needy had been directed by a very inexperienced or a reckless brain.

As the Superintendent drew out article after article belonging to the wardrobe of a man of fashion, he scratched his head perplexedly over the uses of some, and chuckled over the inappropriateness of others. When he discovered a heavy great-coat and several suits of warm cloth, he crowed with delight, assigning them to one name and another as he shook them from their folds. The luxurious underclothing he flung into a contemptuous heap, pushing them care-

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lessly aside with his foot. Waif soon discovered the pile, and, first kneading its softness with his feet, laid himself down purringly.

"That's it," said the Superintendent, catching sight of him enthroned. "You've found about its one use to me, Waif. I might as well dress my men in cobwebs as in those things. But look here, will you! What's this? If it ain't just the ticket for Joseph. He's been crying for a black coat for Sundays these weeks. I told him to keep on prayin' and trustin,' and here it is. Waif, you lazy tramp, help me shake it out. What in life's this cut? Well, I'm blessed if she ain't" —

He dropped the coat on the floor and sat down on the edge of the trunk to laugh until the tears ran over his face. Wiping them away with the back of his hand, he stooped and lifted the coat again. As the long satin-faced tails swept the floor he fell into another crowing ecstasy.

"A regular full-dress suit," he gasped. "Bless her onthinkin' soul! Now, who'd she imagine was goin' to wear this thing

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down here ! I see Joseph in it of a Sunday, carrying the tails over his arms, and turnin' the satin lining out on the boys ! Oh my, my " — He was still shaking as he drew out the rest of the costume.

" Vest, pants, coat, — it's all here, and ain't it fine ? "

He rubbed the broadcloth against his face as he ruminated.

" I might sell it, but I kinder hate to. I'd never get its worth in a shop. I'd like to keep it just to look at, like a doll. I guess I'll have to pack it away and take private bids on it. "

He threw out the remaining contents of the trunk, and again seating himself on its edge, laid the coat on his knees, seeking for the original folds. After absorbed twisting and turning, during which his lips worked as earnestly as his hands, he looked dubiously at the bundle of cloth which his labours represented.

" You will have to lay it on the floor to fold it, " said a voice from the bed. The Superintendent looked up quickly.

" If you know so much about folding

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dress-suits, young man, you'd better get up and fold this one. Have you got your backbone again? There's nothing like sleep and coffee to fetch it."

"Yes," answered Bracken, rising, "I am myself again, fortunately or unfortunately, thanks to you."

"Do you feel like you owe me something? Would you like to pay it?"

His guest's reply halted between pride and humiliation.

"I will pay you with the first opportunity."

"It's a bargain. To-morrow's Sunday, and you can pay me by staying to my gospel meeting. That will make us quits. You could make a honest livin' just folding clothes, young man. You've polished off that coat while I was thinking about it. It might have come from the store. Fold that vest and pants too, will you? Now, ain't it pitiful to think of a woman having no more knowledge than to send that here? She means the very best, poor thing. Well, she's young enough to learn. Her husband's out of town, or this ridickerlous thing wouldn't a happened, I can tell you. He's

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got sense enough to balance ten like her; but then he's a generation older than she is. How I came to know about her was through her maid. I pulled a boy of hers out of the gutter for her, and in turn she introjuced me to her mistress. That's the way it goes. Bread on the waters!"

Bracken, kneeling on the floor over the clothing, listening half absent in mind, raised his head to reply, and found his eyes on a level with a name and address printed in distinct black letters on the trunk's side. He started back with a smothered exclamation, then bent quickly over the garment he held, folding and refolding it before he spoke.

"Is that her name?" he asked in a low voice, and pointing out the letters.

The Superintendent peered over the side of the trunk. "'A. B. Atwood,'" he read. "Yes, that's it. I didn't see that before. '*Church Square.*' They've took a house opposite the biggest church here."

"What," asked Bracken deliberately, "what was her maiden name?"

The Superintendent shook his head.

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"I can't tell you. I only knew her since she's married. They're strangers — just here for the winter. Ain't this a funny world! Now look here. Just to-night the same woman that in her almighty ignorance sent me that dress-suit is giving a ball that I know more about than any of the fine folk who'll be there. Her husband, he don't deny her anything in reason, but she's a pride about keeping in her allowance. I sensed that. When I was talking up my Rescue Home here to her, she told me right out how it was, and said she hadn't a penny to give me then, but I could see she felt it; and, sure enough, next day came a good check. Where do you think she got that money? It was half what her husband gave her for her ball to-night. That's what her maid told me. Don't you call that learning? I'm goin' to teach her more too before I get through. Are you going to fold the rest of them things?"

Archibald Bracken had drawn the remaining clothes nearer, and was mechanically folding these also. He dropped them as the Superintendent spoke.

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"I wish you would. You do it a heap better than I can. Put the best back in the trunk with the dress-suit, and lay the rest out on the beds for use. I'll go downstairs now and look after Joseph. He's been quiet so long, I'm afraid he's in mischief. He's just like a child. Come on, Waif. Did you ever see a cat before that follows like a dog? Look here, right at my heels ev'rywhere I go. Want to get in your grandpa's arms? Jump, then."

As the door closed on man and beast, Archibald Bracken with a gesture of abhorrence swept from him the clothes by which he was surrounded, and sat in the midst of the confusion, his face buried in his hands. When he looked up again at the printed name and address mutely facing him, he flushed angrily, and bending forward struck scornfully with the back of his hand at the offending letters. With the childish action the flush on his face deepened, and he drew in his breath quickly. He sat staring before him gloomily, yet with more composure, until his gaze again dropped on the scattered clothing, then his open hand suddenly

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swept out and closed, as if grasping an embodied thought which rose before him.

"Yes, I will do it," he said aloud, as he rose to his feet. "I will see her once more."

From the clothing which he had thrust from him as if the very touch offended, he made a hurried selection, one article here, another there, until a full suit of the underwear lay spread out on the bed. He drew out from the trunk the folded evening suit, and, tossing over the contents of the trays until he found the smaller accessories he desired, laid all carefully together.

Twenty minutes later the cheap looking-glass over the rude toilet-table reflected a figure such as its depths had never before held, — that of a man immaculately attired in full evening dress, whose light hair, carefully brushed, fell away from the trained parting over dark eyes blazing with excitement, and lips that parted in a derisive smile, as he glanced about the poor room, and at his own white-faced image. Then, turning away, Bracken snatched up the great-coat over which the Superintendent had so much rejoiced. Wrapping himself

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hastily in its folds, he walked boldly from the door, and down the stairs, making his way unchallenged from the house.

Outside he found the city lamps lit and burning on either side of the street in short serpentine trails, for it was a hill city. As he looked ahead of him, the line of lights broke off abruptly at each summit. From the top of the slopes they stretched out longer, curving down, then up again in the next ascent.

Bracken wandered on aimlessly. The night air played revivingly on his face, and, as his lips parted, he drank it in as a cooling draught. Through the open windows of the druggists' shops he passed, he could see the clocks hanging within, and follow the passing of time. Once when there came quite a distance between shop and shop, his hand moved mechanically toward his watch-pocket. Finding it empty he started and stopped, then threw back his head with a harsh laugh and acceptance of returning memory. It was ten o'clock when he at last set his face in a new direction, taking close account of the names and

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numbers of the streets he passed. His step quickening with the consciousness of a definite end in view, he soon reached a point where a massive building rose before him, set in the midst of a square of green grass.

The churchly pile was topped with spreading domes and high belfries, above which slender crosses showed dimly against the sky.

Archibald Bracken paused a moment to look up at a belfry clock. The light burning behind its glass dial once more gave him the hour. On the opposite side of the street was a large house brilliantly illuminated in every window. A string of carriages blocking the way before the door, the hum of voices and laughter, with an occasional escaping strain of music, told of feasting within. Bracken crossed the street and looked at the closed door. For the first time he hesitated, then moved quickly up the steps. The door opened noiselessly at his approach, and he entered. Looking about him deliberately, he walked through the long hall inside, past open doorways

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framing gay tableaux of colour and banked flowers, of graceful laughing women and crowding men, on to the dressing-room at the back of the house. It was almost empty when he reached it. Two or three men standing talking together had already laid aside their hats and coats. Archibald Bracken flung off his coat also, and followed them. As they entered the ballroom to circle about their hostess, he could see nothing but their black-coated backs and bending heads. Then they parted to left and right, disclosing her standing against the heavy-leaved foliage, alone before him. The flame-coloured robe she wore wrapped her closely, as might an actual flame. Above its unrelieved brightness her throat rose like a white cherry blossom breaking from its warm sheath. Half on her bosom, half on the folds above, lay a spray of amaryllis, its stiff, flat stem struck as a band of green across her heart. From the chain about her neck hung drops of opals, the shifting flames burning in their hearts unquenchably as vestal fires. Opals, swaying on the quivering wires which bound them

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in her heaped-up hair, baptised her with dancing light. The warm blood that bathed her from bosom to brow as she grasped the fact of his presence seemed to Archibald Bracken to transform herself into a flame, elusive, unapproachable, as those encased in her jewels. She came a step to meet him, and he saw only the light in her eyes.

“Archie !”

Her voice was a breath, yet in his ears and hers it echoed through the rooms.

“Not here,” she murmured hastily ; “ up the stair ; the first room to the right. I will follow you when I can escape.”

In the withdrawing room at the head of the stair he waited for her. When she came she was breathless, as one, in fact, escaping pursuit. She closed the door behind her, and moved quickly toward him, her hand outstretched. Bracken let her come within a step of him, then, looking full into her face, he put his hand behind him. Hers dropped to the back of the chair by which she stood as she spoke sadly : —

“You have sought me in anger, then, Archie ? You can refuse my greeting ?”

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He bowed gravely.

"You, madam, are not the injured one. Aline, what have you to say?"

She replied impulsively, bending toward him, —

"That I thank God in seeing you again."

"What God?"

Aline turned from him sharply, covering her eyes with one hand; the other, resting on the chair-back, trembled as he went on: —

"The God by whose name you vowed to be faithful to me in my reverses, to wait for me forever, if need be? The God you called to witness in the vows we repeated together as a closer binding on the day we parted, you resting sobbing in these arms?"

She moved quickly to face him, the tears still hanging on her lashes.

"Enough; you pass all bounds. I refuse to listen."

The man's anger seemed to rise as a wall before his eyes, shutting out her protest. He rushed on blindly, flinging out words like blows: —

"You shall hear me. If but for once in

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your ignorant life, you shall see things as they are. You who could throw me aside as a worn-out glove, forgetting how often it has caressed your hand, your cheek, can stand there and talk to me of your God—you who sold him for mammon without a quiver?”

With a motion rapid and irresistible as that of a humming-bird, she had caught his hand before he could elude her.

“You shall hear me also before you accuse me of barter. Did I know God from mammon in my ignorant life? You, too, were a part of that life. You lived it with me. Was there a greater crime than failure in our calendar? That crime you committed. Ignorant! I was in an abyss of ignorance that I look back on shudderingly. You have learned by suffering, Archie. Do you think I have not suffered in learning?”

She turned away, her voice breaking. Bracken drew a slow step nearer to her. Raising his hand, he touched lightly the jewels that trembled on her bowed head.

“Tell me,” he asked; “this man who

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bought you, who clothes you in jewels, do you pay this suffering as their price ? ”

Aline raised her face to him, a smile breaking through the quivering of her lips. The tears blinding her eyes hid from her the hands which were suddenly stretched out toward her and as quickly withdrawn.

“ After I had broken with you,” she said gently, “ I sold myself to the highest bidder. From the man who bought me, from the man who is my husband, I have learned of how little value was the woman he purchased. It was dross for dross, and he knew it in the buying. The woman he has created longs only to be worthy of him. Through him, indeed, I first learned to suffer ; not by him. His voice pointed out to me the wrong I had done you. He taught me remorse, repentance for my faithlessness. He has helped me to search for you everywhere, in every place. Archie, my worst dreams have been of seeing you destitute, throwing away the life I had ruined. Where have you hidden so cruelly ? Why have you let your mother, your father, why have you let me so suffer ? Do you now

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wonder that I thanked God in seeing you, and seeing you thus? Had you been found, as I have dreamed shudderingly of finding you, I think it must have broken my heart."

His face hardened and darkened.

"Let it break, then," he answered brutally. "Aline, you must have become a good woman. Only a good woman could have so flaunted the noble husband, the happy marriage, in the cast-off lover's face. Look at me! Do clothes so make the man? Stripped of them, I am the being of your lowest dreams. Do you not recognise these robes of samite? They are the noble husband's cast-off raiment. None of all this is I, save myself, or what is left of me, and these."

He thrust out his foot rudely. It was shod in his own patent leather shoe, cracked, rubbed, and incongruous.

"As you see," he ended grimly, "I do not stand in your husband's shoes, where I should by every right."

Aline shuddered at his laugh, drawing back from him speechless, her eyes widening with horror as he went on:—

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“Do you know where I spent last night? Let me draw a picture for you. Think of your ballroom as empty of furniture, and for its carpet imagine wallowing human beings. Where men are now dancing, laughing, jesting, walking upright, picture them lying lower than the beasts of the field. ‘On thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat.’ Of these I am now one. In the Rescue Home which your patronage honours I have eaten their dust. I have lain in their common bed. I have breathed them into my nostrils. I smell them now. I have held their hideous murmur in my ears. Have you ever heard it? Here an oath, there a word, there a laugh; the shaking chain of the bound tiger! Have you dreamed such dreams? From that I have come, to that I return. Like Dives, I have wished for an hour on earth. Unlike him, my wish has been granted. His was the easier part. My hour is over.”

He moved toward the door as he spoke, but Aline was before him. She was quivering from head to foot; her white face, drawn and desperate, rose startlingly above

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her gala dress. The hands which she stretched out imploringly were shaking.

"You shall not go. If my suffering is nothing to you, think of your father, your mother. They have forgiven me; they have been searching for you with me. Let me tell them where you are. At a word they would go to you, even through the horrors you describe — as would I."

"You," he repeated. "You know nothing of what you speak. The description is gilded, yet see how it has driven the blood from your cheeks, the power from your body, and set horror in your eyes."

"I know more than you realise. I have seen and talked with the Superintendent of the Rescue Home. Do you know his story? He has lain as low as the lowest there. He has known every horror which they know, and now he gives himself to save others. He was able to retrace his steps. He has made his very sins a ladder of salvation for others. Archie, hear me. Out of my own life I speak to you. I fell as low as you can have fallen. I sold my body as surely as you sell your soul. Had

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I then possessed a soul for selling, that too would I have sold. Look in my eyes. They are not the eyes you used to know. Are they those of a fallen woman? I have been rescued as you can be. Do not go back. Have mercy on me. Let my repentance atone in part!"

Her clasped hands were lifted, entreating him. She bent more and more imploringly toward him, until, as she ended, she was kneeling at his feet. He lifted her in silence. Aline stood before him sobbing, shaken, unable to support herself. He drew her to a near sofa. In so doing, he avoided her touch, and moved a step from her when she was seated.

"Aline," he began, "in part you wrong me. I did not seek you expecting to cause such suffering, or to see this woman. A wild impulse made me follow you here, that was all. I had no plan. Had I known that my fall could mean all this to you, you should never have learned of it. Perhaps I possess the true criminal's temperament, and have no power to foresee consequences. Certainly in my plunge into oblivion I did

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not reckon on sinking to this. So late as a week ago I would have called it impossible. Now that I am what I am, you must let me be to fall yet lower, or rise again as it happens. Do not feel too responsible. A man's deeds are on his own head, and one good has been gained by our meeting. I do not carry resentment beyond the grave. The woman who roused its bitterness is dead. You are not she."

Aline looked up newly stirred.

"Archie, if you can so forgive me, forget too. Let me wake you from this hideous life as I have waked from dreams of you. Let me write one line to those who would give their world to receive it."

"No," he answered quickly; "not for ten worlds. You know nothing, nothing of the depths to which man can fall, to which I have fallen. Between me and those I have left there is a great gulf fixed. If it is to be crossed, I, not they, must pass it. No, Aline, when I leave you, as I shall in a moment, I forbid you to speak one word of me to them, to any one; and I have the right to do so. Forgive me if I remind you

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that your power to dictate in my life is over."

She bowed her head, accepting sadly.

"That I have forfeited. I do not assert it. I will do nothing against your will. In return, in parting, Archie, I must ask of you two favours. You can grant both, for they bind you to so little."

She raised her hand, and detached from her hair a part of the gleaming oriflamme which quivered there. As she held out the jewelled pin, it flashed as a wand tipped with fire.

"If I know that you have this by you," she said, "I shall be less wretched. At the worst, I shall know that you need not be hungry or shelterless."

He shook his head, drawing back.

"Aline, you must see that I cannot," he began, but, looking into her face, the words died on his lips. "It shall be as you wish," he said gently; "give me the jewel."

Her face cleared as he took it. Her next words were stronger:—

"I said two favours; one you have granted, and now the other. I want you

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to remember through all, through whatever may be or threaten, that the door of your home is always open to you. For that I can answer. Archie, it is more than open. Your father's, your mother's arms are stretched out from it toward you. When the day comes that you feel you can return to them, to your own place in the world, then you will write to me, will you not? Let me be your messenger. If you can find no words in which to tell me, then send me a bare line, a token; anything which I could recognise as coming from your hands would be enough. I should understand, and be able to interpret to them. Remember the door is always wide — listen! Some one is calling me. They are coming; Archie, speak to me quickly! You will promise?"

She laid her hand entreatingly on his arm.

"Yes," he replied, "so much I promise."

The door broke open to admit a reproachful, noisy body of revellers, and the woman whose anguish had dragged her to her knees but a few moments before, stood

on the same spot to receive them, laughing her apologies.

Archibald Bracken, following her to the landing outside, stood where the light from the stairway lamp fell brightly on his worn shoes. He noted it, but without realisation, until, guided by a swift feminine motion, the flame-colored train swept to one side, covering his feet. Then he looked up with a start to see also that her gloved hand almost imperceptibly motioned him toward the stairway, at that moment deserted. Obeying the gesture, he descended, but at the first turn paused for a moment, looking back to see her standing above him in the flood of light, surrounded by adulation, laughing, radiant, sparkling as the oriflamme above her head, from which as he alone knew one of the brightest gems was missing.

Once out of the house he ran, in what direction he scarcely knew. When he finally turned into a street strikingly familiar, he doubled his pace as a lost dog when it suddenly finds the home trail. It was Sunday morning when he reached the

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Rescue Home. His knock was answered by the Superintendent himself, who stood looking at his panting guest as if considering whether he should not shut the door in his face. Waif, walking close after him, leaned his head against the Superintendent's leg, looking up into the wanderer's face as if also regarding him judicially.

The Superintendent seemed about to speak, then changed his mind. He stood aside from the door, and Archibald Bracken entered. In that moment Waif seized his chance. From between his master's very feet, calm and unobserved, he stalked out into the night from which the other offender had returned. Silently the Superintendent led the way up the stair. As they reached the door of the hall where the men lay asleep, dimly seen by the low lights, Bracken shuddered. The Superintendent glanced at him as if again considering.

"Come," he said finally, "you won't have to sleep with the boys to-night." He moved on to his own room, where he motioned toward an empty bed, stating briefly

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that as Joseph happened to be away it might as well be used. "And," he added drily, glancing at the borrowed plumage, "you may as well help yourself to one of them ruffled nightshirts too, and finish up your job neat."

With the manner of one half dazed, Archibald Bracken received and followed his instructions; but the last sounds in the Superintendent's ears that night were his guest's restless movements and irregular breathing.

Later in the morning, when Bracken rose from his sleepless bed and dressed himself once more in his own clothes, it was only to sit absorbed and silent, his gaze fixed on vacancy, until the Superintendent, casting his eye upon him, set him straightway to active work. There was enough to be done in the time given. The hall where the men had passed the night was to be swept and cleaned, and the benches returned from the platform to their proper place on the floor. For the first time Bracken saw the room by daylight. It was large and light, with windows cut in either side wall. The spaces

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between doors and windows were papered with inscriptions, some taken from Scripture, others evidently the outpouring of an original mind.

A square placard at the head of the room bore the motto of the work. It began with a large S., the common initial letter for three words — *soap, soup, salvation*. So soon as the room was restored to order, the men came crowding back to take their seats, waiting for the free breakfast which they knew every Sunday morning brought to them. The general appearance of most of the guests bore witness that the “ Soap ” of the programme had been carried out, and they waited patiently for the next word in order. Assisted by Bracken, Joseph, and some picked converts, the Superintendent passed up and down the aisles, carrying baskets of tin mugs, a boiler of coffee, and baskets of bread. When these had been distributed among the fasting men, when the dry bread had been eaten, the coffee swallowed, and the mugs returned, that which represented “ Soup ” was also scored off the list as accomplished. The Superin-

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tendent began preparing the platform for "Salvation." Bracken, who had eaten his morning meal with Joseph, found a seat among the men on a bench at the foot of the room. On one side of him sat a cleanly blue-eyed young German, on the other an unmistakable American, lightly built, with nervous motions and eyes full half an inch too close together. His face had been refined ; it was so still, though bearing signs of wear that in a garment would have been called tattered. He was disgracefully ragged and soiled.

The Superintendent stood at his platform desk, his Bible open before him. His tried converts were collected together on the platform behind him. One who had proven musical sat before the little melodeon against the wall, and "Salvation" began with a hymn.

Of the singing and the prayers which followed, Archibald Bracken heard little more than a loud noise and a monotonous murmur. He did not even turn his head when the Superintendent, who was seated at his desk singing lustily, suddenly started

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to his feet, with the opening of the second hymn, his lips closing on a word half uttered. Stepping heavily from the platform to the floor, he made his way quickly down the aisle, followed by every eye in the room with one exception. Only when the returning footsteps passed him again did Bracken look up. But with that look he almost leaped from his seat. White as the ghost of her last night's self, her eyes fixed steadily before her, so near that he could have touched her with his hand, Aline was walking up the aisle, following the Superintendent to the platform.

"A woman preacher, I guess — they sometimes visit us," whispered the guttural German. Bracken replied with a savage gesture for silence. Aline had seated herself in the chair which the Superintendent gave her and was facing the room. At first she did not or could not raise her eyes. When she did, Bracken felt the shudder which she repressed at the sight before her. With what seemed to him a visible effort, she forced herself to look down the room, bench by bench, into each separate face

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there, her own paling more and more. One further line of those faces, depressed, repulsive, or suffering, and then would come the bench where he sat. He looked desperately to right and left. The next moment her dilated eyes seemed to him to draw the very soul from his body. He caught his breath with a vague fear of what might follow, but she had found what she sought and sat motionless, her gaze fixed.

In a volume of sound the rough voices rose through the hall, singing a hymn familiar to them all.

“Are you weary, are you heavy hearted?
Tell it to Jesus, tell it to Jesus;
Are you grieving over joys departed?
Tell it to Jesus alone.

Tell it to Jesus, tell it to Jesus,
He is a friend that's well known.
You have no other such a friend or brother.
Tell it to Jesus alone.”

The young German at Bracken's side led the chorus in a tenor so high and true that, her tense attention broken, Aline's eyes wandered to him once or twice, but ever

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returned again to the face she knew too well. The Superintendent rose, and the preaching began. Something on the same order, though never quite like it, Archibald Bracken had often before heard, in street revivals; but, watching Aline, he realised anxiously that this was to be a new experience for her. As the Superintendent warmed with his own words, her gaze falling from the face where it had been fixed, was drawn to the strange features of one man and another through the room. Bracken saw this awakening interest with an ever mounting uneasiness that banished thoughts of self. Her concentrated attention was what he had least desired, now he would have given worlds to recall and hold it.

"Christ wasn't born in no uptown mansion," the Superintendent was saying.

He spoke quaintly in a vernacular understood by his listeners.

They gave rapt attention to his crisp and clipping phrases.

"It was to save the homeless and the lost that the Homeless came. To save you and me. Wasn't I as low as the lowest

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here when he came and lifted me up? All you've got to do is to raise your hand like this. Raise it high above your head, out o' the dirt and disgrace, and cry, 'Here, Lord, take it. I can't stand alone.' Then hold fast, and the Lord will never forsake you. That's what I did in a hour of agony, and I've been walking with my hand in his ever since. Just the minute I let go of the blessed Saviour's hand, down I would fall to where you are, or maybe lower, to where I was before. I know myself as well. Yes, indeed; the Lord and I know. Boys, you've seen how comfortable my little office is, — nice warm fire in there; chairs and a desk, and a good carpet. I tell you, I can sit at that desk and look acrost the street, into the market there where I lay the night before I give up and put my hand in the hand of the Lord. There I lay under a stall, dirty, drunk, covered with vermin. No man had a decent word for me, but the Son of God, when he came. I never got a meal but with a drink or 'a hand out' from some door on a crack. To-day you know there ain't a man in this street but takes

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his hat off to me, 'How do you do, sir?' Even the saloon-keepers, fightin' them as I am, night and day, they treat me civil. I respect myself now; that's it. You can't ask folks to respect a man who don't respect himself. Lord, make these self-respectin' men, so that we may respect them as we would!

"Men, what have I to gain by standin' here, day after day, talkin' to you like this? Nothin', nothin' at all. You've got to believe I'm only working for my God. Bread that's cast upon the waters, in the hope of return, only comes back all swelled up, and not fit to eat. I've seen that, time and again. I just stand here sowing the seeds of his word where they may fall. Lord, make the harvest great! I tell you, it's never too late to rise and come to him. It's the Devil only that whispers, 'Too late.'

"You can't be lower, and you can't be later in comin' to God, than I was. 'Come unto me,' that's his word. He don't say nothin' about too late, just, 'Come unto me.' He's always ready and waitin' for you. His

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arms is ever outstretched. Strait is the way and narrer is the gate ; but it's always open — wide open."

Archibald Bracken's soul grew sick within him. At these words, almost the counterpart of those in which Aline had spoken to him of an earthly father's open door, she had turned, and her eyes, swimming in tears, sought his with meaning.

All this, to which the men about him listened with more or less emotion, passed by Bracken as the empty wind. But, as he could too plainly see, it was as the breaking up of the waters to Aline. With the rise and fall of the rude eloquence, her colour came and went. The memory of her first shrinking and horror was slipping away from her. She hung on the speaker's words breathlessly, her eyes turning from his face to the wretched faces of those with whom he strove, as if wondering at their delayed response. The discourse, kind, severe, illiterate, and strong, went on to the close.

As he ended, the Superintendent crossed the platform to bend over Aline and whisper in her ear.

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"He's asking her to speak now," said the German, settling himself to listen. A rush of angry blood rose to Archibald Bracken's face, his hands clenched as he saw Aline shrink back, once more the startled woman who had first entered. The Superintendent did not press her; but Bracken only breathed freely when he saw him leave her side and return to his desk, continuing the exercises.

"You've had my testimony, boys," he said. Then, turning to those at the back of the platform, "Who speaks next?"

Joseph was first from among the converts. His brief testimony was given in language as broken as the manhood he had almost lost.

"Only he who thirsted in the desert knows how I thirsted for drink," he said simply. "My longing was not to be quenched until I drank of the Blood of the Lamb, and that washed it away. Praise God, it's gone. I haven't tasted liquor for two years. I ask your prayers to keep the first drink away from me."

"Lord bless you!" said the Superintendent as Joseph sat down. "That's it, boys."

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Joseph knows. Let the first drink alone, and you won't get drunk. Who next?"

One by one the converts on the platform rose, each with his own short, wretched confession of the past and his roused hope for the future. Now and then the Superintendent threw in a word of warning to the speaker, or called the attention of the listeners to some point. Any attempt to dwell on past sin met his quick "That's over, brother. Put it behind you. God bless you! Go on."

The repeated story of good homes wilfully deserted, or of misfortunes that dragged down as sleuth hounds, flowed on sickeningly to one who heard such testimonies for the first time. Bracken saw the dark circles come under Aline's eyes, and deepen into her white face.

The young American by his side sat with his face buried in his hands, and had so sat for minutes, overcome or asleep.

"That's all," said the Superintendent at last. "Now, boys, you've heard" —

An unexpected voice rose from the floor of the hall.

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"There's one more would like to speak," it said.

"Then speak for the Master's sake. Stand and speak," cried the Superintendent. The young American raised himself, and stood faltering among the seated men. He grasped the back of the bench before him with both hands. His face was not quite the same in that his own tears had washed part of the soil away.

"In the last seven days," he began weakly, "I have suffered an agony beyond my words. This is my home city. I came back to it after three years' absence, like this. Need I say any more? In these three years I have lost all I was born to have. I thought I had forgotten it ever had been mine; and I had forgotten until I saw the old streets, and spent this week turning each corner like a hound, for fear some old friends or one of my family should see me. I can't stand it. Last night I drifted in here and I heard the prayers. I heard them again to-day. I must begin again. I scarcely know what has come to me."

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He sank back trembling.

"God bless you!" cried the Superintendent. "You don't know, but I do. GOD has come to you. Hold his hand fast. Lord, keep him in the hollow of Thy hand! Boys, you've heard both sides, now. These brothers have showed you what the Lord can do for man. This new brother tells you what a man does by himself in falling and suffering. Which will you choose? As you sit there, I know what you're thinking. You will, and you won't; and you can't decide. Stand up like men, and choose. Chances don't lie around waiting for you, any more than gold does. You know that Salvation's gold. Take it now. Stand up and raise your hand to the Lord. Here, Lord, take it. Rise up, men. Who will rise and lay his hand in the hand of the Lord?"

At the back of the hall one man rose and stood.

"One, thank God!" counted the Superintendent. "Isn't there another? Don't stand up unless you mean it. Don't stand up because I ask you. Stand up to drop

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the past, and begin your life over again. Who'll do that? 'Two, three, four, five, six. Lord bless you all! Who next? Can only six men in this hall" —

He broke off, falling back a step, one hand still resting on his open Bible, the other half extended toward Aline, who had risen and moved forward. Bracken almost groaned aloud. How could he stop her? From the moment the young man at his side arose and spoke, he had known just what to fear. A deep horror, and with it the light of a new hope, had leaped into Aline's eyes. From then had she besought Archibald Bracken desperately, voice to voice; she could have pleaded with him no more earnestly than did her expressive face and eyes, asking of him the preposterous, the impossible. All this of the emotional about them, to him merely something outside, fitted to those who could or would accept it, inspired her with a compelling power. Before the woman, not the force which moved her, Bracken trembled. He saw her standing above him on the platform, and his brain reeled. In a kind of vision

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he beheld her again for a moment as he had last looked up to see her stand surrounded by her own kind, brilliant, beautiful, and protected. His impulse was to rise from his seat, to sweep her from the platform, from this disgraceful company, this foul atmosphere, actual and moral, to her safe home. He writhed under the bonds which held him. Could he, a tramp among tramps, act and not compromise her? Would she compromise herself despite him? Speak she should not.

Yet she was speaking, low and unsteadily at first, then thrillingly clear. The room had the silence of the dead save for her voice.

"I thought I could not speak to you, but I must. I have a message to deliver to one of you. I know you are not all to blame for being here. Some one of you may be able to repeat the very name of the wretched being who drove you to this. It is to him I speak. Suppose that wretched creature were a woman as I am, and that she learned what she had done; suppose her agony because of it were as great as

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your suffering, and she came to seek you, because in her despair she had no power to keep away; suppose she stood here before you holding out her hands and crying to you, 'Hate me forever if you will, but take the curse of your ruin from my life. I cannot bear it, I cannot carry it and live.' "

He saw her arms stretched out to him as in the past they had been outstretched a hundred times. His spirit rose, and his body followed. Her name had almost escaped from his lips as he sprang to his feet.

The Superintendent lifted his hand from the Bible, flinging it high toward Heaven. "Another!" he cried. "Seven this day! Praise God for the harvest."

Archibald Bracken staggered back at the sound. For a moment he faltered, his eyes fastened on the face of the woman standing motionless above him, her hands extended, her eyes, her face, her lips, her whole being calling him. With a sudden calmness, Bracken steadied himself and stood upright among the counted.

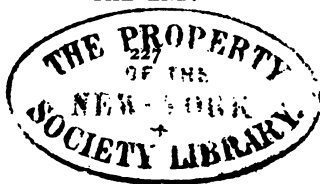
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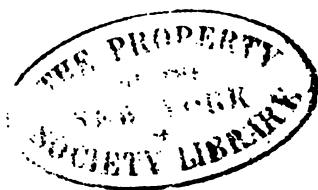
Aline's body swayed and yielded, her face dropped in her hands. The Superintendent caught her arm and led her to a chair, where she sank down, her face still hidden. The doxology rolled over her bowed head in waves of sound which she did not hear. The louder echoes of tramping feet did not penetrate to her solitude. When she moved at last, the hall was empty and the Superintendent stood alone before her, looking down gravely into her face. A bit of folded paper lay on her knee, to which he pointed.

"One of the boys dropped it there," he said, delicately turning away. "Sister, rejoice, the Lord himself opened your lips this day."

Her heart contracting, her hands shaking, Aline lifted the paper. Its contents rolled from her trembling fingers. On her knees, flaming out gloriously in the grimy room, lay the missing jewel of her oriflamme.

THE END.





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